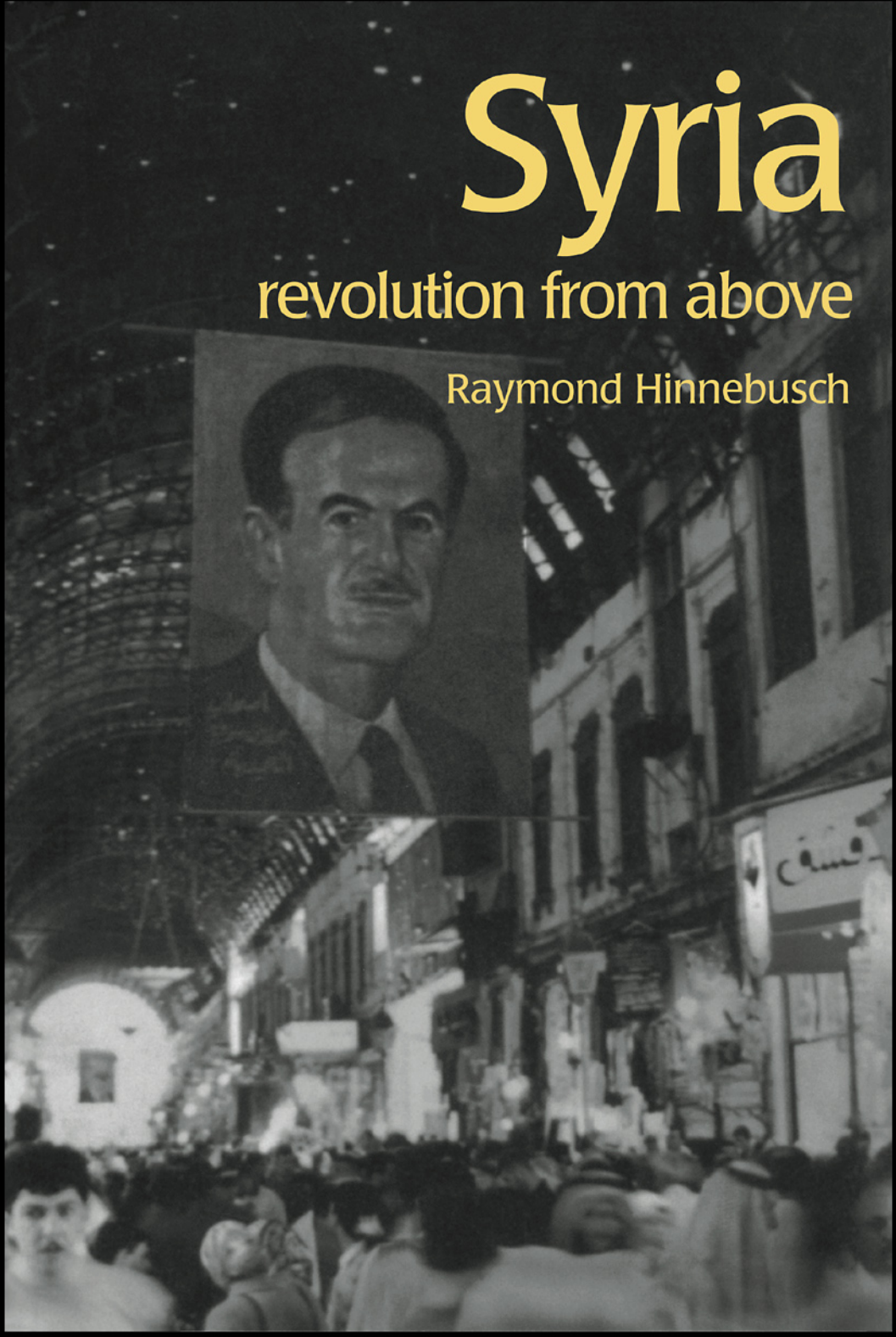
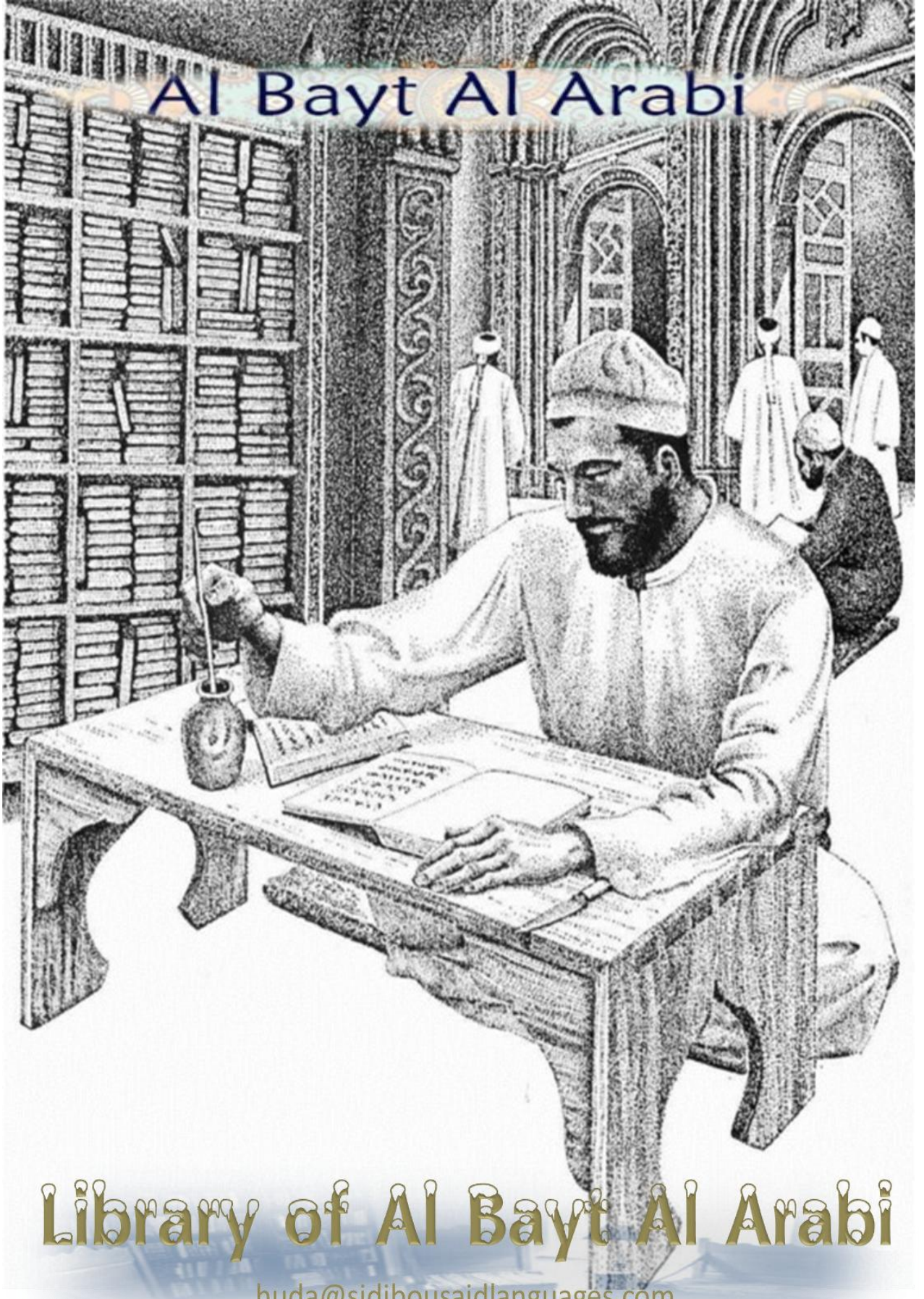
Syria

revolution from above

Raymond Hinnebusch



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Syria

This study examines the development of the Syrian state as it has emerged under thirty-five years of military-Ba'thist rule and, particularly, under President Hafiz al-Asad. It analyses the way in which the fragility of the post-independence state, unable to contain rising nationalist struggle and class conflict, opened the way to the Ba'th party's rise to power and examines how the Ba'th's "revolution from above" transformed Syria's sociopolitical terrain. The mixed strategy of power concentration under Asad is then examined and the way in which the creation of a presidential monarchy buttressed by trusted kin and clients commanding instruments of repression was combined with the creation of Leninist-like political organisation incorporating a rural constituency. Subsequent state-society relations, including the rise of a new class, Islamic rebellion, the survival of civil society and Asad's resort to political decompression as a substitute for democratisation are then surveyed. The author moves on to assess the political economy of economic development, showing how agrarian reform, industrialisation and economic liberalisation created a more equitable and diverse but fundamentally flawed state-dominated economy. The final chapter examines how Asad's foreign policy has turned Syria from a victim to an actor in the regional struggle for power.

Raymond Hinnebusch is Professor of International Relations and Middle East Studies at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Syria, including *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'thist Syria* and *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process.*

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REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE

Raymond Hinnebusch

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CHRONOLOGY

1963, October	Sixth National Congress of Ba'th Party radicalises Party ideology
1964, April	Muslim Brotherhood rebellion in Hama repressed
1964	Formation of General Union of Peasants
1965, January	Nationalisations of business herald "socialist transformation"
1965, May	Eighth National Congress of Ba'th Party reflects party internal power struggle
1965–66	Jordan waters dispute; Syrian-backed Palestinian guerrillas raid into Israel
1966, February	Radical coup led by Salah Jedid ousts Aflaq and Bitar
1967, June	Third Arab-Israeli war; Israel occupies Syrian Golan Heights
1969	Land reform completed
1968–70	"Duality of power:" struggle between radicals and Hafiz al-Asad's pragmatist faction inside Party and army
1970, September	Syrian intervention in Jordan during "Black September"
1970, November	Asad seizes power, ousts radical Ba'th faction
1971, March	Asad elected President
1971–72	First *infitah* or economic liberalisation
1973, October	Fourth Arab-Israeli war: Syria fails to recover Golan Heights
1973	Euphrates Dam completed; Lake Asad forming
1974, May	Kissinger brokers Syrian-Israeli disengagement on the Golan Heights
1976, June	Syrian intervention in Lebanon, clashes with PLO
1976–80	Fourth Five-Year Plan intensifies industrialisation
1977	Asad denounces Sadat's visit to Jerusalem
1978	Syrian troops clash with Christian militias in Lebanon
1978	Anti-Camp-David Syro-Iraqi unity talks
1979, February	Iranian revolution; Syria recognises new government

1980 October	Syria supports Iran in Iran-Iraq War
1978–82	Islamic Rebellion in Syria
1981	Israel annexes Golan Heights
1982	Hama rebellion crushed
1982	Israeli invasion of Lebanon
1983	Syrian-backed Palestinians fight Arafat's PLO in Tripoli
1983	Agricultural cooperatisation completed
1984	Syria foils Israeli-Lebanese peace accord
1984	Rifat al-Asad's bid for power fails
1986–88	Economic crisis in Syria; second *infitah* begun
1987, December	Palestinian *intifadah* begins
1989	Lebanese General Aoun challenges Syria's Lebanon presence
1989, October	Taif Accord blueprints settlement of Lebanese Civil War
1990, August	Syria enters anti-Iraq Gulf coalition
1990, October	Syria crushes Aoun, consolidates power in Lebanon
1991, May	Law No. 10 encourages foreign investment in Syria
1991, May	Syrian-Lebanese Treaty of Friendship signed
1991, July	Syria enters Madrid peace negotiations with Israel
1993, September	Oslo Accord between PLO and Israel threatens to isolate Syria
1994, January	Asad-Clinton meeting reinvigorates Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations
1996, March	Turkish-Israeli alliance announced
1996, May	Likud election victory in Israel dims Syrian-Israeli peace prospects
1999	Election of Barak in Israel revives Syrian-Israeli peace prospects

FOREWORD

The death of Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad on June 10, 2000 marked the end of an era for Syria and the Arab world. In the last decade of his life, Asad had an almost unique stature as the last credible standard bearer of Pan-Arab nationalism. His death arguably signals the end of this Arab dream.

His career paralleled the rise of the Ba'th Party and the consolidation of the modern Syrian state. The son of an Alawi peasant family, Asad rose to power through the Ba'th Party and the military, and was part of the Ba'th military cabal which overthrew Syria's feudal oligarchy in 1963. He was a member of the leadership that launched the Ba'th revolution from above including the land reform, the expansion of education and the state-sponsored industrialisation which benefited Syria's popular strata. He was also defence minister in the government that, in the name of the Palestine cause, provoked the disastrous 1967 war with Israel in which Syria lost the Golan Heights. From this trauma, Asad emerged determined to recover the lost land and honour from Israel.

Taking sole power in 1970, Asad thereafter created a stable state, turned Syria from a victim of stronger forces into a respected regional player, and conducted a tenacious struggle to contain Israeli dominance in the Middle East. Unlike Sadat, who abandoned Arab rights, and Saddam who squandered his country's bright future in reckless adventures, Asad was rightly admired by many as the one Arab leader to combine nationalist principle with a realistic strategic vision.

But this was achieved at significant economic cost and with the sacrifice of political freedoms. Asad's personalisation of power enervated all political institutions. Nothing more strikingly signals the failure of Syria's political modernisation than the seeming transformation of a radical republic into a new dynasty; this Asad engineered. If the result is the continued stability of a fragmented society, many Syrians will consider the price to have been a reasonable one. But Asad leaves his son and successor Bashar al-Asad

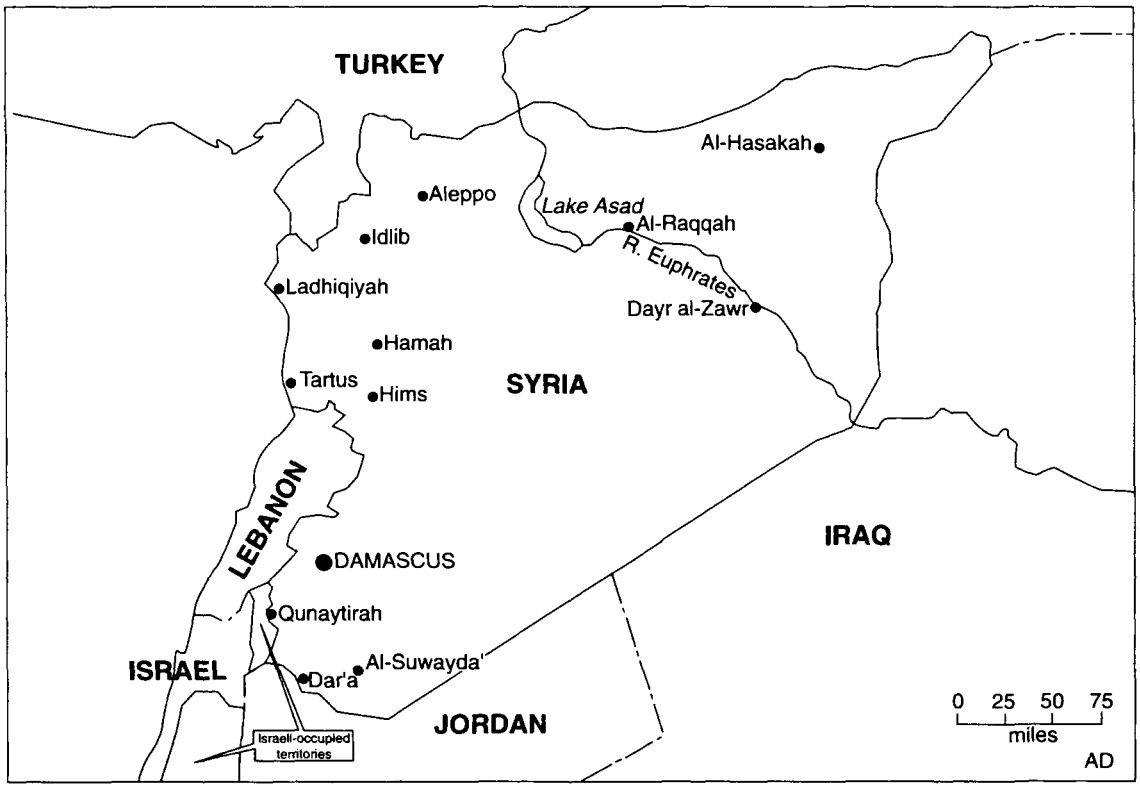
formidable challenges: to bring the economy into the modern world and to satisfy the desires of the younger generation for a better, freer and more peaceful life. Asad failed, as well, to reach the honourable peace in the pursuit of which he mortgaged Syria's future; it is up to his successors to do so without sacrificing the standards for an honourable settlement which he established.

It is this story, the saga of modern Syria, of which Hafiz al-Asad was both a typical product and a major shaper, which the following pages will tell.

GLOSSARY

ABSP Arab Ba'th Socialist Party
asabiya Group solidarity, based on kinship or a religious cause
ASP Arab Socialist Party
ayan Notables, normally land owning, possibly holding public office and enjoying local prestige
bilad ash-sham Geographic Syria, including contemporary Jordan, Israel and Lebanon
comprador Commerical middlemen, usually importer-exporters, between the "core" developed economies and "peripheral" less-developed countries
ha Hectare, equivilant to 2.47 acres
ikhwan Muslim Brotherhood
infisal Separatist regime in Syria after the UAR (1961–63)
ISI Import Substitute Industrialisation, the early stage of light to medium industrialisation aiming to domestically manufacture commodities formerly imported from the developed states
jama'a Group, referring to Asad's personal faction
Jazirah Eastern grain-growing area roughly corresponding to the province of Hasakeh
mukhabarat Secret police or intelligence service
NDP Net Domestic Product
PA Populist Authoritarianism, authoritarian regime seeking mass support against the old oligarchy
qaumi National, referring in Ba'thi parlance to anything pertaining to the wider Arab nation
qutri Regional, referring in Ba'thi parlance to Syria, a "region" of the Arab nation
qutriyun "Regionalists," referring to Ba'thi militants from the provinces whose political ambitions focused on Syria rather than Pan-Arab union
SAR Syrian Arab Republic
shari'a Muslim law
shura In Islamic parlance, consultation of the ruler with qualified advisors and representatives of the people
S.P. Syrian pound, worth about 45 to the $US in the 1990s
suq The traditional urban market

ulama Collective term for Muslim religious scholars and jurists
umma The Islamic community or polity
zakat Making charitable contributions, a pillar of Islamic duty


TURKEY
Al-Hasakah
Aleppo
Lake Asad
Al-Raqqah
Idlib
R. Euphrates
Ladhiqiyah
Dayr al-Zawr
Hamah
Tartus
Hims
SYRIA
LEBANON
IRAQ
DAMASCUS
Qunaytirah
ISRAEL
Al-Suwayda'
Dar'a
JORDAN
Israeli-occupied territories
0 25 50 75
miles
AD

Map of Syria

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALISING THE SYRIAN BA'TH STATE

The theme of this study is the nature and development of the Syrian state, chiefly as it has emerged over nearly four decades of military-Ba'thist rule. The Ba'th party was by no means Syria's only important political force but it left the most profound imprint on modern Syria. Indeed, the Ba'th's half century history has paralleled the history of modern Syria itself. The Ba'th created a regime which proved remarkably enduring. It confounded observers who expected its collapse or transformation from the Nasserist opposition of the sixties, the Islamic uprising of the late seventies, from the economic stagnation of the eighties, from the end of the Cold War's Soviet aid and protection, and from economic globalization and democratisation. Moreover, this regime is arguably strong: it carried out a substantial revolution from above in the 1960s and since the 1970s its economic and foreign policies have retained a remarkable consistency in spite of substantial changes in its domestic and international environments.

There is considerable controversy over how the Syrian Ba'th regime may best be conceptualised, perhaps reflective of its complex nature. The Ba'th came to power by a military coup and the army is a central pillar of the regime, but it is an "army-party symbiosis," not mere military rule (Rabinovich 1972). The Alawi minority sect has dominated it, but it is not simply a minority regime and incorporates a cross-sectarian coalition (Van Dam 1981). At its centre is the personal dictatorship of Hafiz al-Asad, but his power rests on complex institutions (Perthes 1995). It has been described as a regime of the state bourgeoisie (Perthes 1995), but it also rose out of and incorporates a significant village base (Van Dusen 1975). Thus, no single one of the typical explanations of the regime—army, sect, class—adequately captures its complex multi-sided nature.

The Ba'th regime is, however, by no means wholly unique and indeed, it may best be Understood as a version of the dominant form of state in the Middle East, the prototypes of which were the region's most successful and imitated state building experiments, Ataturk's Turkey and Nasser's Egypt. This regime type may perhaps best be

labelled "populist authoritarianism" (Hinnebusch 1990:1–3; Ayubi 1992; Ayubi 1995:196–223). Populist authoritarian (PA) regimes embody a post-decolonization state-building strategy adopted by nationalist elites which face simultaneous external threat and internal instability. These regimes, artefacts of the early stages of state building, led and supported by elements of the small middle class, and initially based primarily on command of the military and bureaucracy, face the challenge of winning legitimation for their power among the mass public. New entrants to the international system at the bottom of the world power hierarchy and on the "periphery" of the world capitalist system, they also seek to consolidate independence through state led "defensive modernisation" based on import substitute industrialisation in the virtual absence of an industrial bourgeoisie (Hudson 1977; Ayoub 1995).

This state building project is seen to require, in Trimberger's (1978) words, a "revolution from above." Such a revolution effects a major transformation in elites, political institutions and social structure but is initiated from above by "reform coup" and without the mass violence and insurrection from below typical of great revolutions. Insofar as the PA regime uses its concentrated power chiefly to attack the old dominant classes while seeking legitimacy through egalitarian ideology and the political incorporation of middle and lower strata, it is arguably "populist," that is, an "authoritarianism of the left" which challenges rather than defends the traditional, privileged status quo. But PA regimes neither necessarily remain popular or representative of popular interests; indeed they suffer from a built-in contradiction between their attempt to mobilize yet'control popular participation. Whatever their limitations, however, such revolutions from above have been the main vehicles of socio-political change in the Arab world where both mass revolution from below and evolutionary democratic reform have been rare.

I.
EXPLAINING THE RISE OF POPULIST AUTHORITARIAN ISM

What the Ba'th called its "Eighth of March Revolution" (thawrat aththamin min athar) is sometimes viewed as a mere military coup or sectarian power seizure, but it was substantially more than these. Indeed, the Ba'th's rise to power had features of what Walton (1984) calls "national revolts" from below, that is, social movements which have many of the ingredients of "great revolutions," albeit less explosively combined. In the Syrian case, a radical coup grew out of an anti-oligarchy alliance of a radicalised lower middle class,

including strategic elements of the officer corps, with marginalized minorities and a significant proportion of the peasantry mobilised by agrarian conflict. Such an alliance depends on certain ingredients, adumbrated below, which arguably came together in the Syrian case.

1. International Context: Imperialism and nationalism: The rise of radical regimes in the Third world is a function of nationalist struggle against imperialism and the more damaging the impact of imperialism or prolonged the nationalist struggle, the more nationalism is radicalised, as was arguably so of Syria. The external imposition of state boundaries which fragmented historic Syria and corresponded to no popular identity, combined with the creation of Israel on a part of this territory, generated powerful supra-state irredentist ideologies—Pan-Arabism, Pan-Syrianism and Pan-Islam—with enduring revisionist claims. National and social conflict became inter-linked as the traditional elite's association with imperialism destroyed its legitimacy. Moreover, as the national struggle mobilised and incorporated ever more plebeian elements, nationalist leaders proposed ever more radical social solutions to the national problem; in particular, it was their combination of nationalist ideology and struggle for land reform that nationally mobilised Syrian peasants which, in turn, ensured the national revolution would also be a social revolution.

2. The New Middle Class: The rise of authoritarian-populist states is an artefact of a particular, fairly early, stage of development and class formation. A landed oligarchy dominates the chiefly agrarian bases of national wealth while a small rising bourgeoisie has launched early capitalist development, sharpening the substantial existing class inequalities. Capitalist and bureaucratic growth, coming in cycles, creates a growing salaried and/or small-property-owning "new middle class" but, periodically faltering, frustrates its expectations; the oligarchy also obstructs its political ambitions. PA regimes are normally, first of all, vehicles of a "new middle class" radicalised by the perceived incompatibility between the oligarchic order and the satisfaction of its demands for modern careers and a share of power (Halpern 1963:51–78; Huntington 1968:39–59). This was so of Syria.

3. The military: Army officers are normally elitist and conservative, but may be radicalised if: a) radical reform is seen to be essential to the "defensive modernisation" needed to cope with external threats, and b) the military is autonomous of the dominant class, being recruited from the lower middle class and/or marginal ethnic groups, or from the rural hinterland. All of these conditions held in Syria (Wolpin 9–26, 114–116; 1963:251–280; Trimberger; Huntington 1962; 1968:192–237; Halpern 1963:251–280).

4. Minorities: Where, as in Syria, low class status is associated with certain deprived minorities, that is, where class and communal cleavages overlap, not only will conflict be particularly intense, but deprived communal groups may view class revolution as the solution to their particular deprivations. In addition, the unevenness of mobilisation of different communal groups due to such accidents as geographical location, population pressure and access to education, often results in the disproportionate representation of radicalised minorities in national or class-based populist movements. This was so of Syria, where the main peripheral minorities, the Druze, Isma'ilis and above all the Alawis, embraced the most radical versions of Arab nationalism as a way both of integrating into the national community on an equal basis and contesting the power of the dominant Sunni elite.

5. The Peasantry: Huntington (1968:292) points out that middle class radicalism merely produces instability and that it takes a middle class-peasant alliance to produce durable radical change. However, peasants are only available for political mobilisation when radicalised by intense land hunger and when the landlord class lacks a leadership role in the village (Moore 1966; Anderson 1974). Syria's historically sharp gaps between urban-based landed magnates and the village, combined with the agrarian crisis arising from capitalist penetration and land concentration, radicalised important sections of the Syrian peasantry. Localised peasant movements, combined with the recruitment of peasant youth from the most mobilised regions into the Ba'th party and army, prepared the way for the Ba'th coup and thereafter the Ba'th's mobilisation of a broader rural base from above.

II.
STATE FORMATION UNDER BA'THIST AUTHORITARIANISM

If populist revolt is to succeed, it must be institutionalised in a state. A paradigm for understanding how authority in PA regimes is established and evolves can be derived from various models in the literature. In Ibn Khaldun's Middle East-specific paradigm a new state is founded by a movement from the periphery fired by a vision of radical change which seizes the "city"—i.e., existing bureaucratic chains of command. This corresponds to Max Weber's authority type in which the charismatic leader of an ideological movement aims to launch revolutionary social change. Huntington (1968:140–47) disaggregates the rise of new authority into two phases, arguing that its success requires that the seizure and *concentration* of power at the centre be accompanied or followed by the *expansion* of power. This

requires the revolutionary leaders create political organisations, notably an ideological party, to mobilize new participants whose activism expands the political energy at the regime's disposal. Finally, the consolidation of new power requires, according to Weber, that it be "routinized" in stable institutions, but this may take two quite opposite forms. Power may be *diffused* through legal-rational institutions based on consent and the satisfaction of (largely economic) interests; alternatively, it may be routinized in personal patrimonial authority in which case state power capabilities actually *contract* (Weber 1964:363–373). The Syrian case largely replicates this "life cycle:" power was concentrated through an ideological movement and a revolution from above, expanded through party-building, and consolidated through patrimonialization, at the cost of a later contraction in power.

A.
Building new power

1. Power Concentration: Sect and the Regime Core: The attempt of the Ba'th regime to concentrate power in a new state centre based on ideology and collective party institutions (a mix of charismatic-ideological and legal-rational authority) was obstructed by the factionalism of the new elite, reflective of Syria's fragmented society. Contenders in intra-regime power struggles, even when turning on ideological issues, made use of *asabiya*—kinship and sectarian solidarity—and Alawis, by virtue of their disproportionate recruitment, were best positioned to succeed. The centre was stabilised only when one faction finally won out and its leader, Hafiz al-Asad, established patrimonial authority. Although Asad forged a cross-sectarian coalition, at its core were loyal followers from his Alawi sect. This personal authority was then semi-institutionalised in an office—partly bureaucratic, partly patrimonial: a virtual "Presidential Monarchy." Arguably, this outcome was compatible with the political culture transmitted from Syria's patrimonial past.

2. Power concentration: the military pillar of power: The Ba'th regime used coercion to establish power against the resistance of the majority of the political class, not only the oligarchy but the urban middle class as well. This required reliable instruments of coercion, including the "mukhabarat" (secret police), but above all the transformation of the military into a reliable regime pillar.

In fragmented societies, the army is often the most organised, national-oriented social force with the largest stake in the state and the best equipped to impose order. But whether the military acts to concentrate power or, reflecting society's fragmentation, dissipates it

through praetorian coups and counter-coups, depends on its incorporation into a system of authority. The Ba'th attempted to make the military an instrument of the ruling party through ideological Ba'thization (the Leninist model) but this only infected the army with the party's ideological rivalries. It took the "Ataturk option," the authority of a dominant military politician—Asad—to contain, albeit not eliminate, military praetorianism: a huge military establishment became the shield of the regime while personally loyal Alawi guard units became key power brokers.

3. Power expansion: the party: As a seminal volume on the Arab state (Dawisha and Zartman 1988) suggests, understanding the durability of Arab regimes requires that analysis go "Beyond Coercion" which alone is never enough to ensure stability: government can never directly coerce more than a minority; the ability to coerce depends on the always problematic loyalty of followers, and coercion can only concentrate, not expand power; the weak state captured by the Ba'th had so little power and urban centred opposition had such effective means of resistance that regime survival required power expansion, that is, bringing in new participants through regime institutions.

If the military is crucial to the concentration and defence of power in PA regimes, the single or dominant party is the key to the mass incorporation on which power expansion depends. According to Perlmutter (1981:2–5), such a political infrastructure is the chief feature distinguishing modern from traditional authoritarianism. Huntington argues that the Leninist party, with its core of ideological militants and mass auxiliaries penetrating society, is uniquely capable of both concentrating power and expanding it (Huntington 1968:334–343; 1974).

But is authoritarian single party rule compatible with political participation? It is certainly not compatible with fully inclusive participation but it can, arguably, accommodate limited participation. In fact, authoritarian regimes are normally a function of a split society in which one coalition of social forces imposes its rule on another: while the more common "bureaucratic-authoritarian" (BA) regimes of Latin America aimed to politically exclude the masses in order to impose capitalist development favouring the dominant classes, PA regimes invert this, excluding the dominant classes while seeking to mobilize and incorporate a counter-vailing mass constituency (Waterbury 1983:6–11; Ayubi 1992:98–101; Huntington 1968:344–396).

This "mobilised participation" is crucial for the consolidation of PA regimes, but it may also make a difference for policy outcomes as well: arguably, the more the seizure of power is preceded, accompanied, or

followed by social conflict and political mobilisation, the more the ruling revolutionary party will incorporate true activism, and the more enduring its populist orientation will be as its constituents become a constraint on dilution of the radical ideology and egalitarian policies initially used to mobilize them (Huntington 1974; Huntington and Nelson 1976:7–10; Nelson 1987; Skocpol 1979). In the Syrian case, the Ba'th came to power by coup, not mass mobilisation, but a prior decade of social crisis and anti-oligarchy party activism meant the coup was a delayed outcome of prior political mobilisation which the regime subsequently reactivated and incorporated through the party and its associated corporatist structures.

B.
The political economy of power consolidation

Weber argues that, as ideology inevitably declines, regimes must consolidate power through economic rewards to followers. PA regimes initially do so through re-stratification, the demolition of old distributions of wealth and the state creation of new ones (Apter 1965: 123–133). The state levels the dominant classes, the most independent social forces; control of the public sector and land reform allows it to redistribute resources and opportunity, and thereby foster upward mobility for its constituency while making mass society state-dependent.

The consolidation of PA regimes in the Middle East cannot, however, be detached from war, war preparation and the state's position in the international system. In the Syrian case, the insecurity stimulated by the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially the defeat in 1967, legitimated the creation of an authoritarian national security state. On the other hand, the resources for this project partly derived from Syria's exploitation of Cold War rivalries which allowed it to access Soviet protection, arms and development aid. Moreover, the oil price explosion in the seventies and Syria's status as a "front line state" with Israel allowed it to extract oil rent from regional donors. This transformed Syria into a partial or indirect rentier state, with some of its new rent deployed as patronage needed to satisfy the regime's constituency once redistribution was exhausted (Beblawi & Luciani 1987; Leca 1988).

The patrimonialization of the regime centre, combined with the fluidization of the social structure and the new rentierism permitted the consolidation of a "Bonapartist" regime—one led by a dominant patrimonial leader who uses the bureaucratic and distributory command posts of the state to balance and arbitrate between levelled old and rising new social forces. As the regime's autonomy of society is

thereby enhanced, its orientation alters: defence of state interests—its legitimacy, capabilities, and resource base—is put above responsiveness to the regime's initial popular constituents. Intra-regime politics becomes bureaucratic rivalry over jurisdictions, resources, and incremental policy change while in society class conflict is displaced by individual and group competition for access to state patronage.

C.
Power contraction: patrimonialization, rebellion and the retreat of the state

Consolidation of PA regimes in the Middle East has typically been associated more with patrimonialization than the legal-rational diffusion of power. For their under-investment in institution-building, such regimes typically attempt to substitute legitimation through supra-state ideology (Pan-Arab or Islamic) and reliance on sub-state *asabiya.* Given the great strength of supra- and sub-state loyalties relative to the weakness of identification with the state in the Middle East, this is perhaps inevitable. But the weakness of institutions means, particularly as ideology is exhausted, a contraction of the state's power to drive change.

There are various ingredients in this decline. First, PA's built-in contradiction between the incorporation of new social forces and the authoritarian compulsion to control them eventually results in such low tolerance of activism that the regime forfeits the "political energy" of its own followers; it also sacrifices the potential of party institutions to check the tendency of power elites to treat the state as their private patrimony. At the same time, to the very extent regime consolidation ends the class conflict with the old oligarchy, the regime loses the functional substitute for competitive politics which hitherto kept it responsive to the masses. Moreover, as formerly radical elites, using power to get wealth, are embourgeoised, they lose their radical ideological commitments and turn into a "state bourgeoisie" receptive to the use of wealth by privileged groups to buy political influence at the expense of their plebeian constituency. Finally, as the state is patrimonialized, the power of the regime to get things done, in particular to drive social change from above, melts away. All these tendencies were quickly apparent under Asad.

The descent into patrimonialization and embourgeoisment generates two consequences which result in a substantial alteration in state-society relations. First, political Islam becomes an ideology of protest—even rebellion—which goes well beyond resistance by the old oligarchy to populist reforms and spreads to the much wider groups

frozen out of state patronage networks or damaged by state intrusions in the market, notably educated unemployed youth and the commercial petite bourgeoisie. At the same time, patrimonialization, in enervating the state's economic capabilities, forces an economic liberalisation which revitalises bourgeois factions not readily controlled by the state.

The PA regime may counter these threats to its power either by repression or by appeasing the opposition through limited liberalisation. Its precise strategy depends on the balance of threat and opportunity it faces: specifically, while economic liberalisation pushes the regime to appease the bourgeoisie through some parallel political liberalisation, Islamic rebellion deters it from any relaxation of control. In the Syrian case, the dimensions of the Islamic challenge precipitated massive repression which deadened political life; yet thereafter, the regime, having eradicated all opposition, was positioned to concede a modest political decompression which appeased the bourgeoisie and substituted for serious democratisation. But power was barely diffused and the bourgeoisie remained too weak, divided or state-dependent to check the state or demand further political liberalisation (Ehteshami and Murphy 1996). However, the decline in the capabilities of a regime facing a more mobilised, complex society shifted the state-society balance of power against it. Thus, a regime which once had the power to enforce revolution from above could now, at best, manage incremental policy change.

III.
REGIME CONSEQUENCES: CAPABILITIES AND POLICY OUTCOMES

The authoritarian-populist regime ostensibly aims to carry out a revolution from above and establish a strong state able to hold its own in the international arena. In the early phases of the Ba'th regime, class-shaped populist ideology animated plebeian elites who concentrated the power to impose major social reforms against vested interests. Nationalizations and land reform broke the power of the oligarchy and initiated a levelling social revolution. The outcome certainly qualifies as a revolution from above. But the aims of the revolution were only realised at significant cost and the political energy to impose it was soon exhausted. The very techniques used to build power—patrimonialism, militarism and populism—enervated the economic base of the state while the expansion of its functions outran its implementation capacity.

A.
Agrarian revolution from above

The main test of a revolutionary regime which rose out of the village was arguably its ability to implement land reform, a notoriously difficult challenge which few regimes get right. The outcome of the Syrian Ba'th's efforts is a matter of some controversy. Some have insisted either that the chief beneficiaries were the rural middle landowners (Perthes 1995:80–94) or that rural change was imposed on peasants by an unresponsive bureaucracy (Hannoyer 1985). While such side effects did distort the regime's attempted rural revolution, my evidence (Hinnebusch 1989) and case studies by Metral (1980, 1984) and Khalif (1981) show that land reform was implemented with only a temporary cost in production and that small and middle peasants benefited from substantial land re-distribution and state support. The primary political consequence was the incorporation of the peasantry into the regime, giving the PA state a rural base, analogous to, but quite different from, the alliance with the landlord class typical of BA regimes.

B.
"Neo-mercantilism:" The political-economy of etatist-populist development

PA regimes claimed to follow a third way to economic development, neither capitalist or communist. By contrast, Marxist critics insisted that they followed a state capitalist strategy, substituting for and aiming to create a national capitalist class and engineer a transition from "feudalism" to capitalism. Neo-liberal critics, on the other hand, believed PA regimes merely generated rent-seeking forces obstructing capitalist development.

Evidence can be adduced for both such contrary and possibly unintended *outcomes* of the PA strategy, but its *initial logic* is better captured by the concept of "neo-mercantilism" (Apter 1965:408–16). A neo-mercantilist state fosters economic development, not just as an end in itself, but as essential to the creation of *state power.* Neo-mercantilism is essentially a strategy of "defensive modernisation" which aims to counter security threats while diluting the economic dependency which is believed to constrain an independent foreign policy in post-colonial states. As such, the economic logic of *capital* accumulation (maximised in the capitalist paradigm) is, under neo-mercantilism, subordinated to the political logic of *power* accumulation—that is, creating the bureaucratic instruments of

power, winning support through patronage and populism, and acquiring military capabilities.

Yet, such regimes are not wholly inimical to either economic development or capitalist forces. Import-substitute industrialisation is seen as essential to create the economic base of national power and may be pursued with enough success to leave a permanent deepening of economic development, despite much sacrifice of short term economic rationality (M.Chatelus and Y.Schemeil 1984; Waterbury 1983:3–21). Moreover, unlike communist states, PA states tolerate, even foster a state-dependent capitalist class; although they also constrain it and their re-distributive reforms retard private capital accumulation, the private sector persists as an alternative engine of development which may subsequently be reactivated. Thus, PA strategies are, indeed, a "third way."

PA has, however, built-in vulnerabilities which make it a necessarily transitional strategy which is gradually exhausted. Bureaucratic over-development, populist distribution, corruption and military spending generate a crisis of capital accumulation while the vulnerabilities of import-substitute industrialisation result in trade imbalances and debt. Continued neo-mercantilism depends on acquisition to rent, whether from oil or geopolitically motivated foreign aid. Periods of rent boom, however, only further the over-development of the state, making it more vulnerable to economic crisis in times of rent contraction (e.g. decline of oil prices). Inevitably, once the exhausted state can no longer drive growth or provide spoils, it must start to "retreat" from its multiple economic functions.

Meanwhile, neo-mercantilism fosters a new bourgeoisie at the heart of the state while permitting politically-connected elements of the private bourgeoisie to thrive. As the state's resources are exhausted, the state bourgeoisie begins looking for investment outlets for its (often illicitly accumulated) capital through partnerships with private and even foreign capital (Ehteshami and Murphy 1996; Waterbury 1992). This generates scenarios for economic *infitah:* revival of the private sector and an opening to the world market. Economic liberalisation, in turn, fosters further détente, even a certain amalgamation, between the state elite and both the new state-dependent private bourgeoisie and the remnants of the old oligarchy, thereby altering the social base of the state.

This has certain political consequences. It is accompanied by an opening of corporatist access to decision-makers for the bourgeoisie while, at the same time, corporatist structures are used to contain protest at the austerity and economic reforms which shrink popular welfare and labour rights. On the other hand, a full restoration of capitalism is obstructed under Middle East PA by the rent seeking

behaviour of neo-patrimonial elites; by the preservation of enough popular rights to protect the regime's social base which deters investors; by the reluctance of the state elite to share power with the bourgeoisie, a historical enemy; and because of the discouragement of private investment by war or instability. In Syria's case, this was compounded by sectarian obstacles to the amalgamation of the state and private bourgeoisies and nationalist obstacles to the Westward foreign policy re-alignment required to elicit major foreign investment. In addition, since partial economic liberalisation often initially results in import booms and debt rather than much increased private investment, the state will be reluctant to wholly abandon its economic functions to the private market.

As a result, the seemingly strong authoritarian state is reduced to incrementalism, its policy caught between persisting statism and half-way economic liberalisation. Its policy autonomy is curbed by the contradictory interests (bureaucratic, bourgeois, popular) it needs to satisfy which, in turn, obstructs the reforms needed to reinvigorate state capabilities and the economy. Two outcomes can break the stalemate. One is the maturation of a BA state-bourgeoisie alliance to exclude the masses in the interest of capitalist development through full reincorporation into the world capitalist market. Alternatively, the formation of a democratic coalition between liberal wings of the state elite and the bourgeoisie with surviving elements of civil society could push toward democratisation in which all strata would acquire greater freedom to fight for a equitable distribution of capitalism's burdens and benefits in the post-populist order. In the Syrian case none of these alliances has matured.

C.
State formation and foreign policy-making

The construction of the Ba'th state under Asad ostensibly aimed at forging a regime capable of carrying on the struggle with Israel; as such, state formation was a function of the external threat stressed by the "realist" school of international politics. However, an influential alternative view holds that in third world states foreign policy is shaped by domestic instability. Indeed, according to Steven David (1991), the anarchic struggle for power is less in evidence externally—as most Third World states lack the military capability to threaten each other—than internally where regimes lacking legitimacy, institutions, and secure identity are frequently threatened by rebellion. Foreign policy, in the absence of real capabilities, is thus largely anti-imperialist rhetoric and the exaggeration of external threats to win domestic support (Calvert 1986; Dawisha 1988). In the

Syrian case, Daniel Pipes (1990:115–193) argues that Asad's nationalist foreign policy was meant to divert attention from repressive minority rule at home.

While Syrian foreign policy was, indeed, long a function of domestic instability, Syria also faced—contra David and Pipes—intense and actual, not invented, external threats. These threats motivated and legitimated a drive for state strengthening from which, after 1970, the state attained the cohesion, autonomy of domestic forces, and power capabilities to concentrate on and cope with external threats, much like a realist "rational actor." Thus, two prominent studies of Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad apply versions of the realist model, depicting him as an astute "Sphinx of Damascus" (Ma'oz 1988) engaged in a "struggle for the Middle East" (Seale 1988).

Even in such a consolidated authoritarian regime, however, foreign policy is not as insulated from domestic politics as realism implies: since precarious legitimacy remains rooted in nationalism, domestic stability depends in good part on foreign policy successes. Syria's relatively greater success in the struggle with Israel under Asad goes a long way toward explaining the greater stability of his regime.

IV.
PLAN OF THE BOOK

The following study will examines three dimensions of politics in modern Syria: 1) political change is examined in chapters two and three which show how the instability of the post-independence period opened the door to the Ba'th's revolution; 2) the consolidation of power in the Ba'thist state and the resulting state-society relations is assessed in chapters four and five; and 3) the outcomes of power, that is, the impact of Ba'thist policy on Syria's socio-economic development and foreign policy performance is analysed in chapters six and seven.

Chapter 2
THE FORMATION OF MODERN SYRIA

This chapter explains the forces which shaped the emergence of a precarious statehood in modern Syria, fatally handicapped from the outset by its artificial imposed boundaries, the thin social base of its "traditional" ruling elites and the late start of its capitalist development. It also assesses how the social change and political conflict of the 1950s—agrarian crisis, class conflict, the radicalisation of the army—destabilized the fragile Syrian state and propelled the rise of the Ba'th Party with its alternative state-building project.

I.
ROOTS OF THE STATE

A.
Geographic foundations

Geography has shaped Syria's historical fate. Its location at a strategic land bridge between three continents and amidst desert and steppe exposed the country to movements of diverse peoples and periodic nomadic invasions which left behind an extraordinary sociocultural heterogeneity. The country's geographical complexity—a land of plain, desert, oasis, and mountain—reinforced this fragmentation.

Historically Syria was made up of three separate "worlds:" the city, the desert and the sown. The city was the location of power and wealth (Warriner 1962:67). Location allowed Syria's ancient trading cities, Damascus and Aleppo, to flourish on the East-West trade routes and generated a strong merchant culture, but also made them vulnerable to shifts in and the decline of such trade routes in modern times. While Syria lacks most of the natural resources to support industrialisation, its cities have a long tradition of textile manufacture and artisanship; contemporary agricultural and mineral based industries build on this foundation.

In the tribal world of the desert nomad, there were limits on the accumulation of wealth from animal husbandry, but caravaning and plunder or tribute, mostly extracted from the defenceless village, produced a modest surplus; in recent years, the nomads, increasingly settled, are no longer a powerful social force. The village was historically caught between and exploited by both city and tribesman (Weulersse 1946:61–87, 249–50). Though an agrarian society, Syria is half desert and only 10% of the total land surface receives a supply of rainfall adequate to support stable dry-farming and another thirty percent enough for extensive grain cultivation vulnerable to periodic drought (IBRD 1955:35, 41, 29; Warriner 1948:81–82). Syria's agricultural based economy prospered only when a strong state provided security and irrigation (Hamide 398). But this was only intermittent, for the lack of a unifying river system and an exposed position, making Syria the prize of rival empires, obstructed emergence of a durable indigenous state.

B.
The pre-modern heritage: from imperial autocracy to dependent capitalism

Apart from its role as seat of the Umayyad Islamic empire (661–750), Syria was, for most of its history, a province of a succession of military empires and hence never developed an autonomous ruling class. The Ottoman empire, the last and greatest of these empires, was, at its height, a strong centralised state headed by a religiously legitimised absolute Sultan ruling through an internationally recruited bureaucracy and supported in the peripheries, including Syria, by urban-based notable families *(ayan)* and Arabic speaking ulama (Ahmad 1993:15–30). Land was owned by the state and thus no landed aristocracy existed to exploit the peasants or check the ruler, hence no representative institutions embodying an independent civil society developed. The people were regarded as "raaya" (flocks)—to be protected and fleeced to support the ruling elite. The empire's Syrian provinces embraced a "mosaic society" made up of a multitude of little self-contained communities, ethnically and religiously differentiated, patriarchal in structure and compatible with patrimonial rule from the centre. Islam, the main unifying ideology of the state, ensured the loyalty of the Muslim majority (80% in Syria) while minority religions enjoyed autonomy under their own religious leaders. In the absence of powerful independent corporate groups—estates of aristocratic classes, free cities, a separate church—no strong pluralist tradition paved the way for later democratisation; state power was chiefly blunted by the practical limits of pre-modern technology, periodic

revolts and the clientalist connections of communal and tribal leaders to the centre (Anderson 1974:365–373; Maoz 1968:152–63; Hourani 1946:70–1

The Ottoman empire, in creating a larger market, establishing security, asserting control of the East-West trade routes and protecting the peasants against both predatory tribes and potential landlords, initially stimulated economic growth and was well adapted to maintaining order in a disorderly region and agrarian society. But it and its predecessors provided unfavourable conditions for the long-term accumulation of capital which might have fostered autonomous capitalist development. Despite the trading traditions of Syria's cities, patrimonial rule, notably the Sultan's confiscation of fortunes, and shifts in vulnerable trade routes deterred the accumulation of urban merchant capital (Keydar 1987:13–15; Ahmad 1993:22–3; Andersen 1974:500; Amin 1978). State ownership of most of the land until the 19th century obstructed emergence of an improving gentry or estate managerial class comparable to those in the West and East Asia which might have led an agrarian revolution; instead imperial decline led to tax-farming which strengthened urban notables who squeezed the peasants and starved the treasury without providing security against nomadic depredations (Anderson 1974:372). Agriculture went into decline as security weakened: in Syria, the agrarian base radically shrank from 5 million hectares of cultivated land at its height under the Abbasids to 1.5 million hectares just before World War I. Thus, at a time when the requisites of capitalism were coming together in the West, Syria's economy generated no sustained processes of accumulation and innovation. It fell into a relative decline in the 18th century, rendering it vulnerable to the rising power of the West (Anderson 1074:501–502; Maoz 1968:131–133, 163–165; Klat 1958:47–50; Hourani 1946:25–26, 64–66).

Several centuries of Western penetration, greatly accelerated in the 19th century, progressively incorporated Ottoman Syria into the world capitalist market in which it was assigned the role of primary product producer and through which a local "dependent capitalism" took form. On the one hand, European-dictated commercial treaties allowed traditional industry little protection from mass produced European manufactures which led to the de-industrialisation of the Syrian textile industry and devastated village cottage industries (Owen 1981: 3–9; Hamide 1959:302; Hanna 1978:30). On the other hand, European demand stimulated the growth of cash crops for export and generated a new class of foreign-linked middlemen and moneylenders, dominated by the Christian minorities, who acquired control of parts of the agricultural surplus and diverted it from local to export markets (Owen 1981:92). In their efforts to replace tax farming and

state ownership with private property in land, Ottoman reformers permitted the *ayan* to transform themselves, through the abuse of the Land Code of 1858, into a large landed class at the expense of the peasantry who became their tenants (Keydar 1987:25–48; Ahmad 1993:27). But because private ownership and commercial agriculture were merely imposed on the pre-capitalist subsistence forms of production, they stimulated no agricultural revolution. Although much of the land came to be held in large estates, none of the supposed advantages of scale were derived from it because the unit of production remained the small plot worked by a sharecropper and the landlord made no substantial contribution of investment or management. Production and productivity remained low and foreign competition left few opportunities to invest the profits of commercial agriculture in local industry. Under the French mandate, colonial policy continued the obstruction of indigenous industrialisation and the limited French investment in Syria did not go beyond infrastructure and trade. As such, early capitalist penetration stimulated a dependent, lopsided and limited form of development in Syria. Thus, the modern Syrian state inherited a patrimonial political culture, a fragmented society and a dependent economy (Klat 1958:52–53; Warriner 1948:84–87; Warriner 1962:68–70; Hourani 1946:24–26; Latron 1936:115).

II.
THE BIRTH OF THE SYRIAN STATE

A.
Imperialism, the imposed state system, and the ambivalence of identity

Modern Syria has no history of statehood prior to its creation amidst the break-up of the Ottoman empire after World War I: as such, the political identities inherited by the new state focused not on it, but on smaller pre-existing units—city, tribe, sectarian group—or a larger community—the empire, the Islamic *umma* and, increasingly, the idea of an Arab nation. Although the majority of Syrians at the turn of the century continued to identify themselves as Ottomans or Muslims, even before the fall of the empire, an Arab movement calling for Arab autonomy and power sharing with the Turks had emerged. Syria was overwhelmingly Arabic speaking and preserved memories of its role as seat of the Arab-Islamic Umayyad Caliphate; as such with the collapse of the Ottoman empire, Arabism provided the ingredients of an alternative national identity. Indeed, the birth of the new state as

part of an Arab rebellion against a Muslim empire was a watershed in the emergence of a new secular identity based on language and historical myth rather than religion.

The Syrian state was born out of the W.W.I anti-Ottoman Arab movement which took Damascus (with British help) and briefly established an Arab government there. Led by Amir Faisal, this movement was a Pan-Arab coalition of Iraqis, Syrians, Palestinians and Hijazis backed by *al-Fatat,* a Pan-Arab middle class movement which aimed to establish an independent Arab state in historic Syria (bilad ashsham) as part of a wider Arab federation. While the ascendant ideology was Pan-Arabism, lesser sectarian identities and an incipient Syrian territorial identity coexisted with Arabism: thus, some Syrians resented the dominance of the less cultured Hijazi Hashemites and of Iraqi officers in the new Arab government. But, indicative of the power of the overarching Arab identity were the violent protests that erupted in Syria when the leading Iraqi officer in the government, Yasin al-Hashimi, was arrested by the British for his militant Arabism. Identity wavered between linguistic-based Arabism and an overlapping Syrian territorial identity whose content was, nevertheless, Arab-Islamic (Tauber 1995; Zeine 1960; Gelvan 1998).

The British betrayed their promises to the Arabs and, under the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement, the emerging Syrian state was radically truncated, with Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan detached from it, and the rump turned over to a French "Mandate." French rule could only be imposed by the military defeat of the Arab army at Maysalun and the massive repression of several revolutionary uprisings in the early 1920s (Tibawi 1969:241–378). If the natural geo-historical unit, *bilad ashsham,* might have become a viable focus of identity, the truncated Syrian state was, from its very birth, seen by most Syrians as an artificial creation of imperialism, undeserving of affective loyalty. In this vacuum, one attempt was made by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party to foster a "Pan-Syrian" territorial identity distinct from Arabism, and some other political actors either fell back on sub-state identities or a wider universalistic ideology, such as Islam or communism. But, the dominant identity that would fill the vacuum would be Arabism and the most successful political elites and movements would be those which saw Syrian identity as Arab and Syria as part of a wider Arab nation (Dawn 1962; Maoz 1972; Drysdale & Hinnebusch 1991:54–58).

Arabism became the most compelling integrating bond which alone had the power to compete with powerful sub-state loyalties in an heterogeneous artificial state. The Sunni Muslim majority (69% of the population) in the cities and central plains constituted a core whose

initial Islamic, local and tribal identities were compatible with and, among the educated classes, transmuted into secular Arabism, although a differentiated Islamic identity persisted, institutionalised in the Muslim Brotherhood.

In the mountain or desert peripheries of the state were several Arabic speaking sectarian minorities, some inhabiting compact regions: the Alawis of Latakia province on the western periphery (12%), the Druze in Jabal Druze to the south (3%), and the Isma'ilis in their village city states (1.5%). Also, a significant population of Christians (14.5%), mostly Arabic speaking, inhabited their own urban quarters and villages, divided between the dominant Eastern Orthodox and several Catholic or Syriac splinters (Quilliam 1999:39–41). At the birth of the Syrian state, these minorities were torn between Arab and sectarian identities. Many Eastern Orthodox Christian Arabs were, however, in the vanguard of the Arab nationalist movement and the co-founder of the Ba'th Party, Michel Aflaq, was a member of this community. The French policy of divide and rule fostered Druze and Alawi separatism but the spread of education among these minorities was associated with an embrace of Arabism by the younger generation. They saw it as a secular identity under which all Arabic speakers, regardless of religion, were enabled to participate as equals in the national community and all these minorities became quite active in nationalist politics (Faksh 1984: 136–38; Van Dusen 1975:132–33; Maoz 1972:399; Seale 1965: 133–136). This did not mean that sub-state or other identities were abandoned, but that individuals had multiple identities and which became politically relevant depended on circumstances (Drysdale 1979). In the class conflicts of the fifties, radical Arab nationalism propelled movements cutting across Sunni-minority sectarian lines; however, in the intra-regime conflicts after the Ba'th party came to power, minority groups often tended to fall back on solidarity with fellow sectarians.

Arabism was profoundly ambivalent for state building in Syria. As much as 10% of the population was non-Arab, including the large Kurdish (8%) community concentrated on the north-eastern borders and in their own quarter of Damascus, and small groups of Turkomans, Armenians, and Jews. These minorities were only partially Arabized. Arab identity was a powerful integrating force among the majority Arab population, yet, in focusing loyalties on the larger Arab nation, it retarded the legitimation of the Syrian state and opened it to penetration by transstate forces, often manipulated by neighbouring states at the expense of Syria's stability (Maoz 1972). State building in Syria, unable to fall back on distinctively Syrian historic loyalties or myths, could, paradoxically, only succeed by the exploitation of both pre-existing sub-state loyalties, such as sect, and

the dominant Pan-Arab ideology. The Ba'th regime would be the most successful in manipulating these identities. But for at least the first two decades after independence, the weakness of loyalty to the Syrian state kept it fragile, its ruling elite in an exhausting battle to contain centrifugal forces within and ward off penetration from without.

B.
Rise of the oligarchic republic: the French mandate through early independence (1920–1949)

The rudimentary structures and social base of the Syrian state were established under the French mandate and inherited by the post-independence Syrian elite largely unchanged: a semi-liberal oligarchic republic resting on a "feudal" social base. The French, seeking to co-opt traditional elites, finished the consolidation of a private landowning upper class, thereby endowing the state with a narrow social base. Interlocked with the landlord class were the great merchants—big money-lenders, grain speculators and wholesalers, traditionally hoarding or releasing the accumulated crop as market advantage dictated; they were increasingly turning into a "comprador" bourgeoisie exporting agricultural products and importing manufactures from the West. Agrarian-based trade also provided the base of the traditional urban middle class concentrated in the *suq* which historically provided much of Syria's Sunni religious leadership (Hanna 35–43, 71, 222–243; Petran 1972:70; Arudki 1972:20–23; Hourani 1946:91–92).

A great centre-periphery cleavage divided the dominant Sunni Muslim power elite in the cities from the mass of peasantry and tribesmen in their patriarchal communities. In Syria's highly inegalitarian "feudal" social structure, there was, as local sayings acknowledged, a radical separation between the ownership of land and the cultivator: "he who owns does not work, and he who works does not own" (Klat 1958:52). Some three thousand notable (ayan) families controlled half of all the land, concentrated in great latifundia; but even the bulk of medium and small properties were owned by the urban middle class or rural notables who did not personally cultivate them, while more than two-thirds of the peasants were landless sharecroppers. Land ownership and the credit and marketing operations of merchants allowed the city to live off the countryside and determined a highly unequal distribution of agricultural revenue: the top 2% of the population—the great landed families—received 50% of income, the middle 18% of the population—merchants or middle landowning strata—another fourth, and the

peasant masses, making up the bottom 80% of society, received the remainder (Hilan 1969:221; Zakariya 1984:5–6; Orgels 1962:44–45).

A great cultural gap separated lord and peasant. The ayan never achieved the local leadership status of a true aristocracy or the legitimacy of a ruling class in the countryside: they resided in the city, performed few crucial functions in the village, and had only within the last half century established private control over the land—largely through fraud or force—at the expense of peasants who retained memories of their dispossession. The landlord, regarding the peasant as a mere source of income and power, sought to extract a maximum, while peasants responded with poor working habits, theft, and an occasional jacquerie. The resulting stagnation of agricultural production forced landlord and peasant into a zero-sum relation. The landlord became a repressive power in the village, with the local police normally at his disposal. Since the landlords were predominately Sunni, in the areas where minority peasant communities were concentrated, class hostility was reinforced by sectarian animosity. The landlord-peasant conflict this system generated was a root cause of the eventual fall of the *ancien regime* (Weuleresse 1946, Latron 1936, Hinnebusch 1990:29–40; Warriner 1948).

The great families, descendants of the Ottoman era *ayan,* made up the would-be political elite which resisted or collaborated with the French Mandate. The nationalist movement against French rule generated several outstanding leaders, such as Saadallah al-Jabari, Ibrahim Hananu, Jamil Mardam Bey, Hashim al-Atasi and Shukri al-Quwatli, grouped in the National Bloc, *(al-kutla al-wataniya),* a rudimentary party built on its leaders' clientele links to the leaders of the urban quarters. Nationalist resistance to the French became the focus of political mobilisation but, after the French repression of a major armed uprising in 1925, it settled down into street agitation, electoral politics and negotiations for autonomy. This was partly because the leaders feared continued armed national mobilisation would spill over into social conflict threatening to property (Hanna 1978:89–94, 220–25, 368–80, 409–418). It was also because, to appease Syrian opinion, the French introduced parliamentary institutions, albeit subject to an appointed governor, through which the emerging Syrian elite sought a share of power.

Independence was won largely because the nationalist leaders were able to exploit imperial rivalries, such as Britain's WW II intervention in Syria against the Vichy French which fatally compromised the Mandate and gave Syrians more freedom to fight for independence. The grave weakening of Britain and France in the war and the emergence of superpowers willing to support independence demands against the old imperial states made decolonization inevitable. But it

was Britain, anxious to placate Arab nationalist opinion, which ended France's post-war attempt to restore its rule by force. The French bombardment of Damascus precipitated a British ultimatum that led to French evacuation of Syria (Mardam Bey 1994; Khoury 1984, 1987). Syria celebrated its political independence in April 1946.

Although the new Syrian state was liberal in form, in the first years after independence the notable politics of the pre-modern era persisted. The landlord-merchant upper class made up the natural political elite: its leadership in the independence struggle entitled it to the reins of power in the new state. It enjoyed clientalist ties to the urban quarters of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Latakia (Khoury 1984); the notables of the quarters, wrote al-Jundi (1969:43–44), streamed into government offices, each expecting his reward for the independence struggle, and the regime "was generous with them." But it was the great estates which constituted the elites' power base, both the source of its wealth and of the peasant dependency through which votes could be extracted (Latron 1936:216–239; Klat 1958:57–58; Hannoyer 1985: 280–82).

Given this clientalism and peasant dependency, the frequent lack of party competition in local constituencies and the absence of the secret ballot, elections could produce no transformation in the political elite. Landlords overwhelmingly dominated parliament and the same small group of notable politicians made up the recruitment pool of presidents and cabinet ministers for the three decades from the beginning of electoral politics in the 1930s to its end in 1963 (Winder 1962–63; Dawn 1962). Parties were mere parliamentary blocs of landlords, tribal chiefs and their clients, without ideology or organisation, for, secure in their local power bases, the traditional politicians had no incentive to draw the masses into participation or seek their active support (Allush 1962:14; Van Dusen 1975:122–32; Jabbur 1987:73–74). Illiteracy and ignorance crippled the peoples' "capacity of…political combination" (Hourani 1946:91). Viewing themselves as an enlightened aristocracy, the traditional elite saw no active role for the masses in politics (Warriner 1962:96–97).

The primary task perceived by the post-independence elite was to consolidate the state against tribal and sectarian separatism from within, particularly in the Alawi and Druze mountains, and against the ambitions of the Hashemites in Jordan and Iraq to absorb Syria from without. Otherwise, politics centred on the rivalry of coalitions of notables over office and spoils. The big post-independence divide, reflected in the split of the National Bloc into two factions, was largely regional. Shukri al-Quwatli, a scion of the urban bourgeoisie and a large landowner in the Damascus Ghouta, led the Damascus-based National Party *(hizb al-watani)* and became the first President. The

main opposition was the People's Party *(hizb al-sha'b),* based in Homs and Aleppo and led by Hisham al-Atasi and Nazim al-Qudsi, which replaced the Nationalists in government during the early fifties.

No sharp cleavages among the elite over socio-economic policy were apparent, though there were shades of difference between the more progressive urban bourgeoisie and the landed magnates. The bourgeoisie, ambitious to begin industrialisation, demanded protection for infant industries, which was legislated after independence. Many of the great landlords, however, were reactionaries by any standard, such as those in Homs who opposed the opening of schools in their villages for fear it would stimulate demands for change or the Hama landlords who opposed settling peasants on state land since it would drive up the price of agricultural labour On the major social issue of independent Syria, land reform, landlords would make no concessions, fearing any reform would open the door to challenges to the whole contested legitimacy of their private property in land. Parliament obstructed the mildest proposals for agrarian reform, even the distribution of state land which notables controlled or coveted (Klat 1958:58–59; Hanna 1978:62–88, 210, 394–431; Hamide 1959: 184). Far from leading, the government lagged behind rural demands: villages appealed in vain for assistance in creating co-operatives since officials distrusted such experiments (IBRD 1955:93–94). The government spent only 2.1% of its tiny budget on health in the thirties and in 1937 there was only one doctor available for each 10,000 persons. As a result, peasants suffered from wretched health conditions: forty percent of children died before the age of five and the great majority of peasants had malaria or diseases of the eyes and blood (Hanna 1978:239; IBRD 1955:158). Government was not seen as an instrument of social change: this was the laissez-faire state so congenial to the early bourgeoisie, its main functions to provide security for property rights and encouragement for business. In Warriner's (1948:97–98) dry understatement: "Present day Syria is not a welfare state, nor is peasant welfare a present concern."

Under this system, domination of the government by great interests, communal divisions, the great class gaps dividing society, and the political passivity of the masses, made the state a fragile entity deprived of the loyalties and active energies of the great bulk of the population. Of critical importance, however, was the one major exception to the government's record of neglect: Syria, under the influence of a progressive nationalist, Sati al-Husri, invested major resources in the development of primary and secondary education. Had the old order retained its legitimacy, it could, arguably, have incorporated the wider potential social base being created by such change. Ironically, however, this one major progressive act of the

ancien regime would create the educated middle strata that would bring the regime down.

It was the Palestine disaster which shattered the regime's precarious legitimacy (Van Dusen 1975:129; al-Jundi 1969:44–51). The first symptom of this was the series of military "reform coups" it triggered in 1949. Colonel Husni al-Za'im, the army chief, overthrew President Quwatli and then was, himself, shortly overthrown. By late 1949, parliamentary rule was partially restored, but the new chief of staff, Colonel Adib al-Shishakli, unaccountable to the government, exercised a behind the scenes veto on its policies, and from 1951–1953 established a military dictatorship (Torrey 1964). Military intervention broke the political monopoly of the oligarchy and opened the door to rising middle class opposition. But even as the oligarchy's political power was being contested in Damascus, its still intact control of Syria's wealth provided the patronage and peasant dependency which ensured its continued hold over mass society. Radical middle class political parties penetrated the army and began to adopt modern ideology and organisation, but, recent outgrowths of personalistic followings, they remained small and could not break through the traditional clientele networks which encapsulated the masses. Moreover, although they shared a zealous anti-imperialism and a reformist desire to put an end to "feudalism," they were split on what sort of order should replace it: Islamic fundamentalists, communists and secular nationalists battled each other as much as the ruling elite. Further de-stabilising the fragile state was the penetration of Syrian politics by rival Arab powers, notably Iraq and Saudi Arabia, which backed competing Syrian politicians and military conspirators.

III.
SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE RISE OF NEW ELITES

A.
Economic development and class formation

By 1950, rapid social change was undermining the traditional political bases of the old regime. World War II had provided special conditions for capital accumulation and once the French departed, a multi-pronged economic expansion started. Merchant capital introduced mechanised farming on the vast virgin plains of the *Jazirah,* turning this formerly uncultivated area into a new granary with a surplus for export. A ten-fold expansion in cotton cultivation, mostly in the east (e.g. Deir ez-Zor), also largely exported, was led by

landlords and merchants who introduced motorised pump irrigation in response to high Korean wartime prices. This was accompanied by a major growth in light agricultural-processing industries, almost entirely based on indigenous capital. From 1945–1954 thirty-seven new companies were established and industrial output grew about 12% yearly in the first half of the fifties. A substantial 13–14% of GNP was reinvested in the early fifties. National income almost doubled between the pre-war period and 1954. The emergence of an entrepreneurial wing of the agrarian-commercial bourgeoisie prepared to invest in industry seemed to indicate that, despite its late start, Syria was embarking on a "national-capitalist" road to development (IBRD 1955:18–22; Keilany 1973; Hamide 1959:207–10, 432–36; Hansen 1972:344; Warriner 1962:72–93; Hilan 1969:168–70).

Economic growth led to class formation. At the top, a full-fledged bourgeoisie was consolidated, partly landed, partly commercial or industrial and partly official or professional in character. The economic boom fuelled an explosion in import middlemen, a proliferation of Syrian agents for foreign firms, and a new stratum of construction contractors. Moving out of the old quarters of the cities into new modern neighbourhoods, buying cars and living a life of conspicuous consumption, the new bourgeoisie stimulated the envy of those below it. The conflict of landed "aristocracy" and bourgeoisie, which led to democratic capitalist revolution in the West was not replicated in Syria since both classes, deriving from the urban notability, overlapped. Rather, the upper class as a whole, despite endemic intra-class rivalry, developed a growing class consciousness: its sons acquired Western education which separated it from the populace while parliament provided the organisational framework for a new class cohesion (Safadi 1964:59; Petran 1972:85).

The new Syrian state was also developing, fuelled by capitalist development. Initially a fragile foreign-imposed entity lacking the slightest autonomy of the ruling class, rising popular pressures after independence forced the funnelling of government revenue into an expanding bureaucracy, army, and school system, largely financed by taxes on economic growth (IBRD 1955:193–256). This drove the rapid 26 development of a "new middle class," with only modest property, dependent on salaried state employment, "modernising" in orientation, and with an interest in state-sponsored development. The new associations and institutions into which this class was recruited fostered loyalties to profession, class and nation which rivalled those to family, sect, or quarter and made it increasingly autonomous of the *ayan* (Khoury 1984:527; Jabbur 1987:251–53; Safadi 1964:60). An important stratum of this new class was drawn from the rural towns and the peasantry, making up a partly urbanised rural intelligentsia.

The minority mountain peasantry (Alawis, Druze, Isma'ilis, Orthodox Christians), concentrated in such land-poor areas as Latakia, and seeking in education a route out of a dead-end traditional way of life and a means of achieving status in Sunni-dominated society, contributed disproportionately to the formation of the salaried middle stratum (Van Dusen 1972, 1975; Lerner 1958:274).

Simultaneously, early industrialisation generated a working class which, though still small, was concentrated in the cities and began organising into trade unions which battled employers for better wages and conditions (Petran 1972:86–7). In the countryside, mechanisation, population growth and new urban opportunities spurred migration off the land. The spread of education, communications and mobility undermined the patriarchal authority, clientalist links, and economic dependency through which the traditional elite controlled rural society and began to generate peasant class consciousness. A profound agrarian crisis was shaking the somnambulism of the village: long smouldering landlord-peasant conflict was ignited as modernising landlords started replacing the traditional share-cropping tenure with mechanisation and wage labour, disrupting whole villages and generating a mobile agrarian proletariat. Small holders also suffered from landlord encroachment; for example, the introduction of pump irrigation in the new cotton-growing areas gave investors who could provide the machinery great leverage and often led to the passage of land to them. Capitalist development in agriculture started the transformation of peasants from sharecroppers, who enjoyed a modicum of autonomy and security, into migratory wage labourers on great estates or generated massive rural unemployment. (Za'im 1967: 70; Naaman 1950; Hannoyer 1980:292–95; Warriner 1948:76; Warriner 1962:55, 94–93; Allush 1962:141–42; Hamide 1959:211–52, 441–57, 561–62; Hanna 1978:386–454).

B.
Radical counter-elites

Class formation, in generating new social forces, enhancing inequalities and spreading political consciousness, led to the rise of radical counter-elites contesting the oligarchic order.

1. The Army: Almost from the birth of the state, the army was being politicised and radicalised. Because of the lack of a military tradition among Syria's landed class and French recruitment from the minorities, the army was susceptible, in its class and sectarian composition, to populist sentiment. But it was the Palestine disaster, discrediting the oligarchy, which turned the officer corps into a centre of nationalist ferment and made it a strong advocate of the social

reforms thought needed if Syria was to defend itself from its enemies (Van Dusen 1975: 124; Haddad 1971:193; al-Jundi 1969:50–51).

The first wave of politically active officers, Sunni, urban and middle class, was represented by Husni al-Za'im and Adib al-Shishakli. Za'im saw himself as an Ataturk-like modernizer but was largely out of step with the radical nationalism of the younger generation of officers and was soon overthrown. By contrast, Shishakli, who, as a youth, had joined anti-French revolts and who fought as a volunteer in Palestine, was a strong nationalist. He collaborated with middle class opposition politicians such as Akram al-Hawrani who was leading an anti-feudal struggle in Hama, Shishakli's hometown. As Chief of Staff, Shishakli presided over the expansion and nationalist indoctrination of the officer corps and promoted young Sunni nationalist officers to positions of responsibility. His dictatorship (1951–53) promoted state centralisation and cultural Arabization and crushed separatist movements in both the Druze and Alawi mountains. Yet, his nationalism did not keep him from co-operation with France and the U.S., largely to balance threats to Syrian independence from the pro-British Hashemite monarchies. In addition, once in full power, he broke with and banned the radical parties, promoted the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie, eschewed land reform, lost the support of younger more radical officers and was overthrown in a Ba'th-inspired coup in 1954 (al-Jundi 1969:52–61; Petran 1972:96–102; Jabbur 1987: 150–151; Perlmutter 1969:831).

In the early to mid-fifties a second generation of more politicised and radical officers rose to senior positions in the army. A faction of officers, largely from the minorities, especially the Druze, was drawn to the SSNP, a secular reformist party and main rival of the Ba'th in the army; they supported Shishakli until he crushed a Druze rebellion. Middle class Sunnis from Hama, protégés of the Ba'th leader Akram al Hawrani, Arab nationalist and sympathetic to land reform, also rose to key commands. The 1950 opening of the military academy, through the provision of scholarships, to bright lower middle class or peasant youth, produced a third generation of officers in the later fifties which, yet more rural and plebeian, infected the army with village resentments against the ruling elite. Thus, behind Akram al-Hawrani's Hamawi disciples, there followed a third rank of rural pro-Ba'thi officers: Sunnis from Dera, Isma'ilis from Salamiyya, Druze from Suwayda and Alawis from Latakia who would eventually lead the Ba'th coup of 1963 (Salamah 1969:5–15; Torrey 1964:350–361; Van Dusen 1975:130–134).

At the same time, right-wing officers were purged after several Western-inspired conspiracies against the nationalist government in power after 1956 while the SSNP bloc was decimated after it was

involved in the assassination of a leading Ba'thist officer, Adnan alMalki. By the late fifties, Ba'thi and pro-Ba'th officers, who came to be led by Colonel Abd al-Hamid Sarraj, were the dominant force, but constant jockeying for power took place between them, a group of Damascene bourgeois background and an ex-Shisheklite group now aligned with the communists and the "red landlord" Khalid al-Azm.

Thus, from the early 1950s, the Syrian officer corps had become intensely politicised. Military politics was by no means a mere isolated struggle for power among small groups of officers for, more open to popular recruitment than parliament, the army had arguably become Syria's mostly widely representative national institution (Perlmutter 1969:835). As Jabbur pointed out, the changing balance of political opinion in 1950s Syria was registered through two main processes: coups and elections. While the latter lagged behind in registering it, the army intrigue or coup tended to register it early since the army was more directly in touch with the "attentive public" and able to quickly translate opinion into direct action. As such, the army's gradual radicalisation reflected a similar politicisation of the middle class and increasingly, of the peasantry.

If the army was an alternative "armed" parliament, the cost of this was praetorianism—a politics of military intrigue, coup and countercoup. After the first 1949 coup, senior army officers took to vetoing initiatives of the civilian governments and sometimes overthrowing them while civilian politicians sought allies in the military. While this praetorianism destabilized the civilian government, it also precluded stable military rule since politicisation fragmented the army into factions along regional, ideological and sectarian lines and by loyalty to rival political parties. Not until after 1963 when the army was decisively captured by one political force, Ba'thism, would the military, albeit in partnership with the party, acquire the minimal cohesion to govern.

2. Radical Parties: Several radical middle class parties emerged to contest the power of the oligarchy but the Ba'th party eventually became the main political vehicle which overthrew it. A Ba'thist leadership core emerged in the 1940s. The party was founded by two middle class Damascene school teachers, Michel Aflaq and Salah ad-Din Bitar. Zaki Arsuzi, an Alawi teacher and refugee from Iskanderun and Wahib al-Ghanim, an Alawi doctor from Latakia, played major roles in politicising Alawi youth who would join the party. Jallal al-Sayyid, a Sunni notable from Deir ez-Zor, also played a pivotal role in the early Ba'th. Meanwhile, Akram al-Hawrani founded his own Arab Socialist Party, centred on Hama, which in 1953 would merge with the Ba'th (Abu Jaber 1966; Devlin 1976; Safadi 1964:63–67; al-Jundi 1969:21–36).

In Ba'thist ideology, the Arabs formed one nation artificially divided by imperialism into many states in order to keep it weak; the mission of the Ba'th Party was to awaken the slumbering Arab nation and lead its unification. Hence branches were founded across the Arab world and their "regional" (qutri) leaderships combined under a Pan-Arab national (qaumi) leadership in Damascus. This ideology expressed widespread Syrian rejection of a fragile state embracing but one small corner of the potential Arab nation and impotent in the face of Western imperialism and Zionism. While acknowledging Islam as a respected root of Arab culture, the Ba'th's vision of the Arab nation was secular, embracing all Arabic speakers regardless of religion.

Ba'thism mixed Arab nationalism with a radical populism hostile to the established social order. It preached a national renaissance—*Ba'th*—to be achieved through the overthrow of the decadence and social injustice of "feudal" society. The party's official 1947 program, radical for its time, demanded a major role for the state in national development, social welfare services, labour rights, regulation of private business in the national interest, and agrarian reform. Its stress on the role of the state in development expressed the interests of the rising salaried middle class, while its call for labour rights and agrarian reform appealed to workers and peasants. However, seeking a third way between capitalism and communism that would not alienate the middle class, the Ba'th supported small and medium private property ownership as a source of freedom and initiative. The appeal of this ideology— in particular its ability to bridge the class and sectarian cleavages which divided Syrians—was instrumental in making the Ba'th party the most important and ultimately successful of the radical movements which arouse in post-independence Syria. The Ba'th slogan, *"wahda, hurriyah, ishtirahkiyah"* (Unity, Freedom, Socialism) became the trinity of Arab nationalist politics throughout the Arab world (Aflaq 1959; Torrey 1969:446–54; Abu Jaber 1966:97–138; Jabbur 1987:336–38; Rouleau 1967:162–65).

From the outset, the social centre of gravity of the Ba'th was lower middle class, with a strong rural component. Although several of the Ba'th's early leaders came from higher status families—often "black sheep" or from poorer branches of these families (Sayyid 1973:8), the great majority of the 150 delegates to the party's 1947 founding Congress were middle class professionals or intellectuals. The Ba'th initially found little receptivity in the cities which were dominated by the notables and the commercial spirit and were under the influence of traditional quarter leaders and religious shaikhs hostile to a secular creed. Its proselytization was therefore diverted toward plebeian elements marginal to the traditional networks of kin and clientele on which the city-based establishment was raised. Most of its early

followers were peasant youth who came to the city for an education. Many of these were minority youth, Alawi, Druze or Isma'ili, attracted to a radical and secular movement through which they could achieve integration into the nation and yet challenge the ruling elite. Also, Alawi refugees from Iskanderun (Alexandretta), ceded by France to Turkey in 1939, and homeless Palestinians, both uprooted victims of imperialism, were disproportionately attracted to the Ba'th. It was these early largely rural recruits who formed the core of the party around which later elements would adhere and from which the post-1963 political elite would be drawn (Sayyid 1973:34–39, 84–85; al-Jundi 1969:38–39).

In the fifties, particularly as its student recruits went into middle class careers, the Ba'th did achieve an urban middle class base. In fact, it acquired special strength in the two professions which were most open to youth of modest background: the army and school teaching. Both Hawrani and the Ba'th leaders had personal ties to young officers from the late forties, many of whom attained high rank and strategic position by the late fifties. Teachers became the largest professional sector in the Ba'th; teaching was of strategic importance for the political socialisation of following generations and Ba'thist teachers made the secondary schools and college campuses breeding grounds of Ba'thism.

The Ba'th did not, however, remain a purely student or middle class movement and indeed, it started from the outset, to put together the core of a middle class—peasant alliance which would be crucial to its long term success. Ba'thist students returned to their villages in the summer to agitate among the peasantry and gradually this teacher-student-peasant linkage translated into a rural party organisation (Safadi 1964:61–69; Van Dusen 1975:29–30; Seale 1965:179; al-Jundi 1969:36–45).

Meanwhile in Hama, Akram al-Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party (ASP) was organising educated youth in a challenge to the great landed magnates of this feudal city. Subsequently, Hawrani took his campaign to the surrounding villages and his support for peasants against landlords helped win him a seat in parliament as early as 1943 where he was a major populist opposition figure; he protested the failure to give rights to agricultural workers in the 1946 labour code, demanded the distribution of state-owned land in "feudalist" hands to peasants, defended peasants against landlords in the courts, and pushed for free education for their children. In the early fifties he launched a "land to the peasant" movement in northern Syria, the heartland of the great landed estates, where peasant poverty and oppression were strongest. Soon peasant unrest swept the area: peasants refused to render feudal dues and services, effectively

abolishing these practices in most areas, and fought landlords over control of state land. Hawrani's peasant mobilisation widened from local confrontations with landlord families to a large scale protest movement. In 1951 a three-day rally in Aleppo was attended by perhaps 20,000 peasants from across Syria, who paraded through the streets carrying banners demanding land reform, the first event of its kind in the Arab world (Seale 1965:120). This rural unrest made control of the gendarmerie, guardian of rural "order," into a major contest between the Interior Ministry headed by the great landed magnate Rashad Barmada and the army, more sympathetic to peasant grievances, and contributed to Shishakli's coup against the *shab* party government. When Shishakli turned against the movement, it receded, but after his 1954 overthrow opened the door to Syria's first truly competitive elections, Hawrani, now united with the Ba'th, reactivated the movement.

The new party aggressively challenged the oligarchy. Hawrani set up peasant unions and trucked supporters into villages to challenge the landlord's men, sometimes in pitched battles. According to Hanna (1978:270), the anti-feudal propaganda of the Ba'th and the ASP found ready receptivity among the peasants; they no longer had to search for members but found thousands of peasants ready to enter their ranks. Moreover, as peasants were incorporated, however tenuously, their spontaneous class feeling against the feudalists permeated the parties themselves. Warriner (1962:108–109) judged that the Ba'th Party was "canalising" a peasant movement which was the natural outcome of conditions in central Syria; party processions, featuring tribal drums, dancing and singing, seemed more an expression of indigenous revolt from below than of urban ideologies. Hawrani and his list were swept into parliament with peasant votes, upsetting the representatives of "all that was once great and honoured" in Hama (Seale 1965:183). These events suggested the precariousness of the rural order in the absence of coercive police support and the potential threat to it from a democratic mobilisation of the peasantry (Petran 1972:88–89, 101; Van Dusen 1975:131; al-Jundi 1969:63–64; Seale 1965:105, 120, 177, 183; Torrey 1964:306).

Some peasants were, of course, immune to the Ba'th appeal and variations in the Ba'th's rural support give some insight into the conditions facilitating Ba'thist political mobilisation. Significantly, the Kurdish peasants on the northern fringes of Syria, not identifying with Arabism, were organised by the Communist Party. The little towns and villages of the Damascus Ghouta were also long resistant to Ba'thism for there a graduated property structure mixed large, medium, and small land ownership, the patronage networks of the Damascus notability were relatively intact and landowners were more

likely to invest in their lands to the benefit of sharecroppers; significantly, the dominant ideology was Islamic conservatism. In many areas of eastern Syria tribal shaikhs continued to play real leadership roles in the community, which, combined with its relative educational and infrastructural backwardness, made the area relatively infertile ground for the Ba'th and only after its seizure of state power would tribesmen-peasants, with encouragement from the regime, challenge local power structures. Nevertheless, agrarian populism enabled the party to recruit a significant following among the peasantry and hence undercut the urban dominance of politics under the oligarchy (Warriner 1962:95).

Both the Ba'th party and Hawrani's Arab Socialists also made some effort to organise the emerging industrial working class. In the early 1950s, unions were controlled by conservatives but the Ba'th reputedly organised the first large scale strike in Damascus (Safadi 1964:75; Jabbur 1987:352–353). In 1956 protests, the Ba'th forced the government to annul a decree allowing business to withhold a portion of a worker's wages for disciplinary purposes and in the same year mobilised 15,000 workers protesting government efforts to break its power in the unions. By the end of the decade Ba'thists and Communists, sharing leadership of the unions, could together bring out thousands of workers in strikes or demonstrations in Damascus, Homs and Latakia. Concentrated and organised, pro-Ba'th workers provided a crucial second support base for the party (Petran 1972:120; Allush 1962:122).

Significantly, however, even after the merger with the ASP, the Ba'th Party did not effectively incorporate its mass support into a nation-wide organisation capable of the sustained mobilisation which might have brought it to power from below; it remained, in Safadi's (89) words, "midway between a tribe and a modern party." To be sure, the drive to recruit through ideological commitment rather than clientalism produced a core of Ba'thi militants with remarkably strong attachment to the party, sufficient in many cases to override traditional loyalties (Jundi 1969:36–37, 50–55; 73; Sayyid 1973:131). But its broad nationalist-populist appeal drew an ideologically heterogeneous following that could not be ideologically disciplined. The 1953 merger of the Ba'th and Hawrani's Arab Socialists created a broader based but never fully integrated movement. As the party grew, it was structured into a pyramid of cells and branches culminating in a national congress and an elected executive committee (Devlin 1976: 16–18). But the formal rules of internal democracy were too often ignored and decisions taken by senior leaders without a consensus, while local leaders with personal followings sometimes went their own way and the party's parliamentary deputies sometimes ignored party

discipline. Factionalism was endemic, frequently ending in the splitting off of disaffected groups. The rank and file alternated between passivity and vociferous criticism of the leaders. Successive party congresses demanded implementation of the internal rules based on democratic-centralism and collective leadership. However, in practice, the party was insufficiently institutionalised to fully mobilize its mass support which remained passive or only sporadically active (Jundi 1969:40, 68–69; Safadi 1964:70, 103–104, 187–188; Allush 1962:39, 95, 200).

As a result, the road to power was a major dilemma for the Ba'th: even its relatively liberal founding leaders, in principle committed to democracy, were disdainful of the "corruption," of electoral politics and ready to enter intrigues with sympathetic army factions; younger members, more concerned with substantial radical change than procedural democracy came to advocate mass revolution on the Marxist model. Too impatient or impotent to take power through either mass votes or revolution, the Ba'th was to gamble that Nasser would share power with it in the UAR and when these hopes were dashed, it would finally end up seizing power in a military coup (Devlin 1976:29–32).

The Ba'th was by no means the only radical party contesting power in the fifties; several others helped to weaken the oligarchy but suffered from crucial flaws which help explain why they did not win out. The Muslim Brotherhood, which advocated the Islamization of the state and social reforms, had durable roots in the traditional urban *suq,* but could generate little support among the educated new middle class which was embracing Arabism or among the minorities who wanted a secular state; and it had little following in the army or the village. The Syrian Social National Party was a direct rival of the Ba'th for the loyalties of the educated middle class, the officer corps, and the minorities. But it was wedded to militant secularism and a "Syrianism" which rejected Arabism as Islamic and hence it had little appeal to the Sunni Muslim majority. Moreover, once its reliance on Western-backed intervention to come to power was exposed, it lost much of its following in the army and among educated youth to the Ba'th (Jabbur 1987:162; Khadduri 1970:193–194; Perlmutter 1969: 835). The Communists, viewed as anti-Islamic, were confined to the minorities, especially Kurds, Armenians and Christian Arabs, and to parts of the urban intelligentsia and working class. They gave little attention to peasant organisation outside Kurdish and Christian villages and they had little following in the army (Torrey 1964:61; Hanna 1978:306, 337, 355; Kaylani 1972: 10). Internationalist, they never really embraced Arabism and their support for the partition of Palestine was decisive in limiting their national appeal. Sami al-

Jundi (1969:70) argued that the "failure" of communism directly contributed to the success of the Ba'th: communism opened the eyes of the people to social problems but since it lacked nationalist legitimacy, people turned to the Ba'th as an alternative. And while the uncompromising secularism of the SSNP and the Communists obstructed their capacity to reach the Sunni masses, the Ba'th gave Islam enough lip-service to crack this barrier.

By comparison to its rivals, the Ba'th's assets were more diverse and balanced. Crucially, it forged the middle class-peasant alliance needed to support radical change. And it came to incorporate, through nationalist-populist ideology and party organisation, enough brains (intellectuals), guns (officers) and numbers (peasants) to credibly challenge the oligarchy.

IV.
CLASS CONFLICT AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION

A.
Economic crisis and class conflict

As long as the expanding economy generated new opportunities for upward mobility and raised expectations of future improvement, the capitalist model in Syria enjoyed ideological hegemony. But the decade of relatively high growth was based on the exploitation of natural advantages that were largely exhausted by 1956. The limits of extensive dry farming and of pump irrigation were soon reached while monoculture and dependence on the export of a few key crops was subjecting Syria to great fluctuations in output, prices and national income. Further agricultural growth and diversification, Syrian intellectuals and international experts began to insist, required intensive investment in irrigation, reclamation and population re-settlement, but commercial capital began to flee agriculture after 1956. It also would entail radical agrarian reform in the vast majority of absentee controlled villages where technology remained primitive. Land reform was deemed essential to create a rural market and generate an agrarian surplus, without which industrialisation would come to a halt and the backward agrarian sector would become a drag on the whole economy (Za'im, 1967; Hanna 1978:339–50; Warriner 1962:77–105; IBRD 1955: 23–25, 74–76, 135–135).

Indeed, industrial expansion was slowing by the mid-fifties as the "easy" agrarian-based light processing industries were established; further sustained industrialisation required a totally new order of

investment. Syria's investment rate had been impressive but wartime capital accumulation was now exhausted and accumulation was insufficient for an industrial transformation (IBRD 1955:399; Ziadeh 1957:245). A "preference for large and quick returns for which there were…ample opportunities outside industry" channelled the bulk of profits into luxury housing, construction, land, importing, franchises of foreign firms, foreign bank accounts and consumption for the new bourgeoisie; thus, from 1956 to 1958 total investment stagnated (IBRD 1955:373; Arudki 1972: 27–28). In the view of leftist critics, this was the classic extroverted dependent economy in which foreign exchange from agricultural exports is spent on manufactured imports, dissipating local profits or funnelling them abroad, thereby limiting both industrial investment and markets (Arudki 1972:30; Zakariya 1984:31–32; IBRD 1955:16–18; Hilan 1969: 227–250; Hilan 1973:163–165). In addition, an unskilled socially depressed labour force raised the costs of production; in 1955 only 13.6% of the work force had primary education. The very low incomes of the bulk of the population, especially the impoverished peasantry, limited the domestic market for industry (IBRD 1955:401) and export opportunities for protected infant industries could not substitute for this. For all these reasons, the double-digit rate of industrial development in the early fifties slowed to 4.5% from 1954–1958 (Hilan 1973:165; Zakariya 1984: 42; Hansen 1972:340–341).

This slowdown in itself would hardly have been enough to discredit Syria's capitalist development, but the very unequal distribution of its benefits and burdens fuelled class conflict as growth slowed. While the upper strata further enriched themselves and engaged in conspicuous consumption, the peasantry, whose security and incomes actually declined, were made to carry the heaviest burdens of modernisation. Capitalist disruption of agrarian society stimulated peasant land hunger and made landless peasants and small holders threatened by landlord encroachment "available" for political mobilisation by radical counterelites. Workers benefited little from the industrial expansion: in 1956, the profits of industry were 2 1/2 times its wage bill. And workers were increasingly organised and politicised (Keilany 1973:61–63; Hilan 1969:226–230).

At the same time, the rising middle class was frustrated since social mobility slowed along with economic growth; the rural branch of this class, often of minority background, close to peasant grievances, and with the least access to the urban connections on which upward mobility depended, was especially alienated. Having only modest property, the middle class was, to a great extent, a bureaucratic class whose prospects depended on expanding state employment; as such, it readily embraced "socialist" arguments for state-led development.

According to the widely accepted view among Syrian intellectuals, in a mature capitalist world where industrial competition requires huge investments, national capitalism cannot hope to succeed without massive government intervention—planning, nationalisation of key industries and public investment. Moreover, only state-led development was thought compatible with the social reforms, above all land reform, needed to ensure a more egalitarian and equitable outcome.

The belief in the bankruptcy of *laissez faire* capitalism became, in a way, a self-fulfilling prophecy since, as the upper classes lost confidence that they could control political events, they lost the incentive to make the investments that might have sustained capitalist growth. Indeed, by the time the Ba'th took power disinvestment had already left scores of private firms indebted shells (Jabbur 1987:89–93, 339–435; Petran 1972:80–113; Zakariya 1984:38–39; Hilan 1973:43, 158–168).

When a period of sustained economic expansion, mobilising new social forces and raising expectations, is followed by an abrupt turndown, it arguably creates the potential conditions for a political crisis; while a strong legitimate state can normally contain and survive such a crisis, in Syria's weak political system, it was enough to tip the outcome of the political struggle in favour of radical forces determined to launch a statist road to development.

The crisis of Syrian capitalism was also intimately linked to the nationalist struggle. The hatred for imperialism, intensified by the Palestine debacle, spilled over into hostility to all Western institutions, especially capitalism. Syria's new middle class became convinced that capitalism meant economic dependency rooted in shared interests between the oligarchy and the West while only a "socialist" economy could support real independence. The argument of the Ba'thists and Communists that the neutralist Pan-Arab foreign policy needed to counter imperialism and Zionism was impossible without uprooting domestic "reaction" enjoyed increased credibility. The need for a powerful state able to mobilize the country for development and defence was widely thought to take precedence over political liberalism, a view inspired by the seeming success of socialism in making the Soviet Union a great power and the prestige of the authoritarian reformist rule being pioneered in Nasser's Egypt. By itself, nationalism need not have led to a decisive turn to the left, but the identification of Syrian capitalism with the West, combined with growing class conflict and socio-economic crisis, gave socialist ideology powerful credibility in nationalist eyes (Sayyid 1973:150–53; Jabbur 1987:279–309; Lerner 1958:279–280; Petran 1972:93–94; al-Jundi 38–44; Seale 1965:116; Allush 1962: 132; Warriner 1962:110–111).

B.
Political mobilisation and praetorianism

The new classes and groups generated by modernisation formed the basis of political pluralization as parties, press, and interest groups proliferated in the mid-fifties. Ideological parties forged political association beyond personal and parochial loyalties while social conflict and nationalist struggle with the West drove mobilisation, pushing political activism out from the halls of parliament and the army barracks to the streets, campuses, even the villages. The expansion of participation, breaking down the traditional isolation between the national and local arenas, shifted the balance of power against the oligarchy and in favour of radical middle class forces.

In 1954, Syria had its freest parliamentary election, the first with a secret ballot and contested by radical parties on the basis of issues. The success of significant numbers of middle class candidates, who took about 20% of the seats, was indicative of the eroding control of the oligarchy over its political bases (Petran 1972:106–108; Seale 1965: 164–185; Torrey 1964:254–263). The elections marked the emergence of the Ba'th party as a major political actor on the Syrian stage, sixteen of whose thirty one candidates won a parliamentary seat, plus ten sympathisers (Jundi 1969:68). The rival Syrian Social National Party, which ran on an anti-leftist platform, got only two seats compared with nine in 1949 (Torrey 1964:263). Hawrani's supporters swept the five seats in Hama, largely with peasant votes; in Damascus, Ba'th leader Salah ad-Din Bitar's success signalled a breakthrough in this hostile traditional stronghold. The communist leader Khalid Baqdash was elected in the Kurdish quarter of Damascus. Yet, traditional notables won the great majority of the 142 seats and the Ba'th party scarcely penetrated landlord strongholds such as the city of Aleppo.

However, the overlap of regional and international conflicts with local ones after 1954 intensified political mobilisation and further propelled the rise of radical parties, especially the Ba'th. The attempt of the Western powers to draw the Arab states into the Baghdad Pact, an anti-Soviet alliance, against the opposition of Nasserite Egypt made Syria a battleground over which the issue was fought. While much of Syria's Westernised notability favoured a Western alignment, the Ba'th and the Communists led a nationalist mobilisation against it which tilted the balance in Nasser's favour in Syria and the Arab world; in turn, Nasser's subsequent foreign policy victories, especially Suez, made him an all-Arab hero whose backing immeasurably strengthened the Syrian political forces aligned with Cairo, above all the Ba'th. So strengthened were they that the nationalist and leftist

opposition could no longer be kept from government power and a segment of the traditional elite, in an attempt to ride the nationalist wave, joined them in the 1956 formation of a "National Front" coalition government committed to a Pan-Arab, "anti-imperialist" course. Those political forces perceived to be pro-Western rapidly lost support and not just the traditional upper class elites: even middle class movements, such as the Muslim Brethren and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party suffered. Subsequent Western-backed conspiracies against the National Front government only resulted in the further discrediting of pro-Western politicians. The resulting purges of remaining pro-Western military officers left the field clear for the rising power of the pro-Ba'th security chief, Colonel Abd al-Hamid Sarraj (Petran 1972: 108–126; Lesch 1992; Rathmell 1995; Seale 1965: 67–72, 179–306; Torrey 1964:267–353 (Allush 1962:33–34; Jabbur 1987:241–242; Safadi 1964:52–54).

In the late fifties, power was, therefore, diffused as never before. Traditional politicians retained the highest offices, including former President Quwatli who now returned to power, and the Prime Minister, Sabri al-Asali. But they now shared ministerial power with radicals, including Ba'thist Foreign Minister Salah ad-Din Bitar, parliament speaker Akram al-Hawrani and the communist-aligned Defence Minister, Khalid al-Azm. The oligarchy retained a majority in parliament where the National Front government was supported by only 65 of 142 deputies, but radical ministers held the initiative as much on the basis of their influence in the army and the streets as in parliament. The leftist dominated army protected them and intimidated their conservative opponents while leftist intellectuals and activists mobilised public opinion through the press, student associations, and street demonstrations.

With bases in government, parliament, the army, the streets, campuses, and the village, the Ba'th party was by 1956 an ascendant political power. Its 6,000 activists in 1954 (Seale 1965:176) swelled to as many as 30,000 supporters by 1957. The creation of Ba'th branches in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq gave the party a nearly unique Pan-Arab stature and prestige. A measure of its rising power, it now began to attract not just idealists and dissidents but the politically ambitious (Jundi 1969:68–73). With a foot in the door of power, the Ba'th began to exploit patronage resources formerly the monopoly of the oligarchy, assuming a role as mediator between the bureaucracy and workers or peasants (Jundi 58–64), while systematically inserting its partisans into the bureaucracy, police, military academy, teacher training colleges, information apparatuses, and in strategic city schools from which demonstrations could be mobilised (Torrey 1969:445). In 1957 bielections in Damascus, the Ba'thist standard-bearer, Riyad al-

Malki, narrowly defeated the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood who conducted a campaign of religious anti-leftism (Jundi 1969:73; Seale 1965:290).

The new constellation of power began to shift the conservative log jam which had blocked social reform for two decades. The Ba'th put forward an unprecedented legislative project, including a law which forbade the expulsion of peasant tenants and increased their share of the crop, and proposals to limit ownership of agrarian property, distribute state domain land to peasants, and extend labour law and unionisation to agricultural workers. The Ba'th also sought strengthened enforcement of the labour and social security laws, a national planning system and state investment in an oil refinery. The Ba'th and its leftist allies had enough power to initiate military and economic links to the Soviet Union, opposed by conservatives as a first step toward a socialist economy, but necessary to the financing of state led development, notably investment in infrastructure and the oil refinery (Jabbur 1987: 91–92 Petran 1972:121). However, the landed majority in parliament blocked land redistribution and the law prohibiting the expulsion of sharecroppers only squeaked through after intimidation from the army and the street (Allush 1962:56–57; Hanna 1978:435).

In the end, the new political mobilisation, though broadening civil society, was not effectively absorbed into the fragile institutions of the semi-liberal state and hence, only de-stabilised it. As long as the mass of "voters" remained clients or passive dependants of the landed upper class, opposition parties lacked the mass support to fully force open the parliamentary-electoral system. Yet, while the dominance of the oligarchy in parliament could not be dislodged, the state apparatus was slowly captured from below by the plebeian elements from which its lower ranks—notably junior army officers and school teachers—were recruited. Since institutional channels retarded social reform, political activism took partly "praetorian" forms—student street demonstrations, worker strikes, and a tug of war for influence in a factionalized army. The exploitation of such leverage—manifestations of the aroused attentive public—not elected majorities, enabled middle class politicians to extract a share of power from the oligarchy in parliament. But they lacked the power to enact the radical reforms expected by their constituents (Jundi 1969:48–51; Sayyid 1973:75; Seale 1965:33–147; Petran 1972:94–104; Torrey 1964:121–237; Ziadeh 1957:100, 206).

C.
The end of the oligarchic republic

The National Front government, a coalition of heterogeneous, even rival forces, was, by 1957, on the brink of collapse. The Ba'th party felt squeezed between right and left; on the one hand, it was threatened by the growing popularity of the Azm-Communist alliance which benefited from Soviet support for Syria against the Western drive to "contain" Syrian radicalism under the Eisenhower doctrine; on the other hand, conservative politicians, alarmed by growing radicalism, were looking for a chance to enlist outside intervention against the left. Meanwhile, the army was disintegrating into a dozen or so personal or political factions. The combination of internal divisions and external pressures on the fragile Syrian state produced a profound sense of vulnerability which led the state elite to seek salvation through union with Nasser's Egypt.

The Ba'th, the one party which had actively worked for Pan-Arab union (Seale 1965:314), saw in a federal union with Egypt a realisation of its principle mission and an opportunity to use Nasser's great popularity to defeat its rivals on both right and left; it expected that it would rule the federal state together with Nasser and that its ideology would become the basis of governance (Jundi 1969:74–76). The army backed union as a solution to its internal rivalries and may have thought Nasser would let it rule Syria. Conservatives hoped Nasser would repress the communists, as he had in Egypt. The Ba'th's rivals, including the communists, opted to outbid the Ba'th in also calling for union with Egypt, expecting Nasser to refuse but he called their bluff and accepted it, but on his own conditions, namely a centralised unified state. Syrian elites had not expected union to be instituted so precipitously or on such terms but their own unionist outbidding had unleashed an irresistible force of public opinion which put all the cards in Nasser's hands and swept them into an Egyptian union without safeguards for Syrian autonomy. Said one participant: "We followed the masses. The crowds were drunk…Anyone at that hour who dared oppose unity—the people would tear their heads off." This episode dramatically exposed how little legitimacy the Syrian state enjoyed among a mass public mobilised by Pan-Arab dreams.

Nasser's design for the new "United Arab Republic" (UAR) into which Syria was incorporated included the dissolution of political parties, not excepting the Ba'th, and a Presidency which put predominant constitutional power in his hands. The UAR began with a great fund of political capital, enormous mass adulation for Nasser in Syria and the support of the political movement mobilised by the Ba'th. But the UAR turned out to be essentially bureaucratic rule from

Cairo in which Nasser sought to demobilise Syrian society, moving first against the Communists but soon working to marginalize the Ba'th in elections to the single official party, the National Union. Bitar and Hawrani were moved to sinecures in Cairo and Nasser, in attempting to bring the fractious Syrian army under his control, transferred hundreds of Ba'th officers to Egypt and replaced many senior commanders with Egyptians. Ba'thi ministers soon resigned from the union government and though the official party line continued to support the union, the Ba'th rank and file was alienated and demobilised. The UAR became a bureaucratic apparatus with the charismatic leader at the top, legitimised by Arab nationalist ideology, and resting on a network of military and police control and on Nasser's vast but unorganised mass support.

This regime had fatal vulnerabilities. While broad sectors of the urban middle class remained Nasserist to the end, they were never politically organised to defend the regime, leaving a gap between the leader and his popular constituency. Instead, Nasser co-opted traditional politicians into office while at the same time launching a series of socialist reforms—nationalisation of banks and big industries and agrarian reform—damaging to their class interests. In the end the UAR, lacking a political class with a stake in its survival, came to depend on its support in the army, but Nasser, in purging "progressive" Syrian army officers, made possible the 1961 military coup by a handful of conservative Damascene officers, acting for the bourgeoisie, who brought the regime—and the Syro-Egyptian union—tumbling down (Abu Jaber 1966:33–56; Jundi 1969:77–86; Petran 1972:117–141; Jabbur 1987:198–296; Allush 1962:86–122; Torrey 1969:354–458; Safadi 1964:251–260; Seale 1965:307–326; Devlin 1976: 79–97; Sayyid 1973:156–158).

The so-called *infisal* (separatist) regime which replaced the UAR from 1961 to 1963 represented an effort to turn back the political clock a decade and restore the rule of the traditional politicians who recaptured parliament and government. Banks and industries were de-nationalised and large tracts of land expropriated under the land reform were returned to big landlords who in some places drove peasants out of their villages. Much of the middle class, both Nasserite and Ba'thist, despised the regime and unionist sentiment agitated the masses. Instability—street riots, strikes, and military intrigue—was rife. The regime briefly survived because the UAR and its fall had sharply divided the nationalist and leftist opposition over whether to seek re-union with Egypt, and if so, on what terms. Thus, an already fragmented political arena was further divided between Nasserites (for union), Communists (against), and Ba'thists (divided) (Jundi 1969:99–100, 103; Warriner 1962:229).

Both the creation and failure of the UAR spelled disaster for the Ba'th party. It split over how to deal with Nasser as Hawrani's partisans broke off and embraced the *infisal* regime while yet other Ba'thists deserted to new Nasserist factions. Moreover, the split with Nasser cost the party a large part of its urban Sunni middle class following, reducing it to its original largely rural core. Remaining activists had lost confidence in Aflaq's leadership after he accepted Nasser's demand to dissolve the party. By 1962 the "Ba'th" was divided into several factions. Aflaq, with a couple of hundred students gathered around him in Damascus and a certain prestige as party founder, sanctioned a congress which met at Homs in 1962 to formally re-establish the party (Rabinovich 1972:38). A second faction of rural intellectuals who controlled the remnants of many provincial party branches, particularly in Dera, Deir ez-Zor, Latakia and Suwayda, and who would come to be called the *qutriyun* (regionalists), were highly critical of Aflaq, lacked enthusiasm for re-union with Egypt and were, instead, embracing radical socialism as their project (Safadi 1964:294; Jundi 1969:90, 95–96). Under the separatist regime they began, independently of Aflaq, to reorganise the party and when the Ba'th came to power in 1963, the Alawi-dominated Latakia branch would be one of the strongest—with incalculable consequences for the sectarian composition of the Ba'th state. Thirdly, groups of dismissed Ba'thist officers, presided over by the so-called party "military committee," close in origin and ideology to the *qutriyun* and dominated by minority officers, were also determined to overthrow the "tutelage" exercised by the founding leaders over the Ba'th and make room for a new leadership (Safadi 1964:8, 286–287, 290, 375; Jundi 1969:84–89, 95–99; Sayyid 1973:172; Rabinovich 1972:36–48).

By 1962 the "military committee" was deeply engrossed in conspiracies to infiltrate the army and overthrow the separatist regime in the name of the Ba'th. The Ba'th party, barely reorganised and having lost much of its mass base, was hardly prepared to rule. However, fearing the party's chances were slipping away, the military committee resorted to tactical alliances with Nasserite officers and the politically independent commander of the Golan front, Colonel Ziyad al-Hariri. Together, they toppled the faltering *infisal* regime in a military coup on 8 March 1963, a year and a half after the break with Egypt. The total lack of opposition was indicative of the *infisal* regime's complete demoralisation. Its fall marked the final end of the semi-liberal, semioligarchic first Syrian republic. Its heritage was ambivalent: civil society had acquired room to develop, particularly among the new middle class. But the old regime, lacking the rural roots to counterbalance urban radicalism and strong institutions to

absorb middle class activism, could not withstand the military-Ba'thist alliance which toppled it.

Chapter 3
THE BA'TH REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE (1963–70)

The Ba'th ascent to power in a military coup should not disguise the fact that it represented a delayed outcome of the political mobilisation of the fifties. A whole new political elite of a distinctly plebeian, rural lower middle class "ex-peasant" social composition decisively displaced the traditional oligarchy (Van Dusen 1975; Drysdale 1981). Its outlook —a combination of radical nationalism and populism—was shaped by these social roots and the social struggle of the fifties. The goal of the new Ba'th leaders was not just another coup but a revolution. Nevertheless, the Ba'th's road to power, on the back of the army and lacking an organised mass base, meant the Ba'th regime started as little more than a handful of officers and intellectuals entrenched at strategic levers of military and bureaucratic power, its claim to power challenged by a wide array of other forces. Survival dictated a drive to concentrate and expand power in which a distinctive state took form, mixing sectarian *asabiya* and military rule with Leninist political organisation and carrying out a "revolution from above."

I.
THE STRUGGLE TO CONCENTRATE POWER

The diverse coalition of officers and politicians who seized power in March 1963, united by little more than their opposition to the "separatist regime," shared power in a Revolutionary Council and a new council of ministers, but immediately began to fall out. The Ba'th first quarrelled with its Nasserite partners over terms of a new union with Egypt: the Nasserites wanted a re-union which would restore power to Nasser while the Ba'thists sought, at most, a loose federation which would allow them to dominate Syria while appeasing Nasser. When negotiations in Cairo failed, a protracted power struggle broke out, with Syrian Nasserites trying to mobilize the powerful unionist sentiment among the urban masses in large-scale street demonstrations demanding re-union and the Ba'thi military

manoeuvring against Nasserites to consolidate its control over the army.

Amidst this struggle, Ba'thist officers successfully carried out the first prerequisite for the consolidation of power: from strategic positions in the high command and crucial coup-making units which they had secured on the morn of the coup, and in alliance with Col. Hariri, they purged hundreds of conservative or Nasserite officers, chiefly of urban Sunni upper-middle and middle class background, while a massive recruitment of Ba'thi village youth and reserve officers turned the army into a rural bastion and shield of Ba'thist rule. Thus ended the possibility of an upper or middle class military restoration like that of 1961. Since many of the new recruits were the kinsmen of the leading minority officers, this amounted to a decimation of Sunni ranks to the advantage of rural minorities. Hariri himself was soon purged. In control of the army, the Ba'th tightened its grip on the state and swept its rivals—mainly Nasserite crowds—from the streets, in a burst of repression. Out of this struggle for control of the army and the streets, Colonel Amin al-Hafiz emerged as the first Ba'thist military strongman and titular head of the regime's revolutionary council; behind him the leading members of the military committee were entrenching themselves at the strategic levers of military power—Salah Jedid in charge of the critical officer's personnel section and later chief of staff; Muhammad Umran, commander of the key 70th Brigade at Qatana, shield of the regime; Ahmad Suwaydani, chief of military intelligence; Salim Hatoum, head of the commandos; and Hafiz al-Asad, commander of the air force. Together with their civilian allies, largely rural radicals, they would also take over the levers of the re-constructing party apparatus. Aflaq remained nominal party leader and the veteran Ba'th leader Salah ad-Din Bitar presided as prime minister over a Ba'th dominated government. Thus, at the outset, from dire necessity, Ba'thist power was being rooted in control of state office, coercive military command, and networks of trusted clients.

But the cost was a severe crisis of legitimacy and the hostility of wide sectors of the politically attentive public. The traditional upper class was being deprived of political power and threatened with socialism; indeed some limited nationalizations—of banks and certain key industries—had already produced a mixed economy curbing the bourgeoisie's control over the country's wealth. The Muslim Brotherhood was a historic rival whose rising political star the Ba'th power seizure cut short. The communists and ex-Ba'thist Akram al-Hawrani rejected the single party rule the Ba'th was fashioning. Most crucial, major portions of Arab nationalist opinion, constituting a big portion of the Sunni urban middle class, were now Nasserite and

hence alienated. That the emerging Ba'th leadership was by now increasingly "minoritarian"—Alawi, Druze, and Isma'ili—and predominately rural and its rivals were chiefly urban and Sunni, gave the conflict between the regime and the opposition a predominately urban-rural and sectarian rather than a class character. While the Ba'th's now chiefly rural base was de-mobilised, the urban opposition was mobilised and concentrated. As such, in the first two years of its rule the Ba'th found itself virtually isolated in the still urban-dominated political arena and dependent on military repression to stay in power; it was probably only the fragmentation and organisational weakness of its rivals which allowed it to survive. But its leaders knew that to retain power and carry out their revolution they would have to break out of their isolation by re-mobilising their potential village constituency (Rabinovich 1972:26–74; Kerr 1971:1–95; Devlin 1976:231–253, 281–285; Salamah 1969:29–47; Jundi 1969: 120–139).

Meanwhile, the Ba'th was sharply divided within. Aflaq, Bitar and their followers wished to continue the traditions of classic Ba'thism: to reach an understanding with Nasser over an Arab federation, pursue a moderate socialism and preserve some democratic freedoms. But they were rapidly forced into the background and the initiative seized by the military committee in alliance with young radical intellectuals who, at the definitive Sixth National Congress, succeeded in fusing Marxism-Leninism to Arab nationalism in a new radicalised version of Ba'th doctrine (ABSP 1972a: 100–102; 1973). The new doctrine gave "revolution in one country" priority over Pan Arab union: power would not be conceded to Nasser or his local partisans. Instead, Arab nationalism was redefined as challenging Israel on behalf of the Palestine cause and subverting the pro-Western Arab monarchies who kept Arab oil out of the battle. In Syria, a "socialist revolution" would be carried out. The new credo held that the bourgeoisie was bankrupt and capitalism in developing countries was inevitably a foreign-dependent comprador enterprise. Under socialism, the heights of the economy—banks, large and medium industry, utilities and foreign trade—would be nationalised and private enterprise replaced with state planning and public investment as the motor of development. This would permit the economic surplus to be diverted from tertiary to productive agricultural and industrial sectors; eliminate the exploitation of labour for the benefit of private owners; and snap ties of economic interest with and dependency on the West. In agriculture, socialism would transfer the "land to he who works it" through radical agrarian reform and establishment of state farms and cooperatives among land reform beneficiaries and small-holding peasants in order to break the hold of merchants and money-lenders. Private enterprise

in retail trade, construction, tourism and small industry would be preserved under state regulation (ABSP 1965).

This ideological mutation was set off by the rise to power inside the party of leaders from lower social strata, whose closeness to village grievances made them much more antagonistic to the traditional urban establishment than the party's older urban middle class leaders. It was also a strategy for consolidating the new regime. Nationalizations would undercut the economic power of its upper class enemies while expanded control of the economy and a growing bureaucracy would give the regime a source of jobs and other patronage for its supporters. The Ba'th party would be refashioned into a disciplined Leninist type party capable of mobilising the masses, with first priority given to political organisation in the countryside where land reform would break the hold of landlords over peasants and enable the Ba'th to mobilize them. This program amounted to a class war in which the propertyless or small-propertied majority—leftist intellectuals, state employees, peasants and workers —would be won over to the regime, reconstructing the middle class-peasant alliance the party had forged in the fifties. Peasant mobilisation in particular would allow the regime to break out of its isolation in the urban political arena (Rabinovich 1972:75–103; ABSP 1973; Devlin 1976:211–230).

But the new leaders faced a struggle to put their blueprint into practice. Intense urban opposition was aroused by the Ba'th's proposed attack on property, and by the rural and minority composition, secularism and radicalism of the new Ba'th leadership. Opposition, spearheaded by Muslim brotherhood militants, backed by the merchant establishment, and financed by the oligarchy repeatedly mobilised against the regime. At the same time, the Ba'thi old guard fought against the radicals' program. In the aftermath of a major 1964 uprising in Hama and other cities, Aflaq's hand was strengthened and the radicals forced to retreat. A new Bitar government meant to placate the urban upper and middle classes promised respect for constitutional liberties and, affirming that the public sector was now large enough, invited the co-operation of private capital. But this proved acceptable to neither the opposition or the Ba'th left; the bourgeoisie, lacking confidence in a "socialist" regime it could not control, continued to disinvest and smuggle capital out of Syria and without a take-over of the heights of the economy, the regime was powerless to stop this haemorrhage. The party left argued that the bourgeoisie would never be won over without returning power to it and abandoning the mass constituency the party wanted to build (Aflaq 1971:184–254; Devlin 1976:211–296; Torrey 1969:466–67; Abu

Jaber 1966:89–91; Rabinovich 1972:75–145; Razzaz 1967:111–140; Petran 1972:176–79).

In the power struggle which subsequently took place, the radicals shifted the balance inside the party through expulsion of some Aflaq partisans and a wholesale recruitment of former rural members, further ruralizing and radicalising the party bases. A parallel struggle in the army, partly ideological, partly over personal power, pitted pro-Aflaq officers led by Muhammed Umran against radicals led by Salah Jedid. When the growing personal rivalry between pro-Aflaq Umran, the senior member of the military committee, and Amin al-Hafiz, the regime's military strongman who had remained above the ideological fray, led Hafiz to back Jedid, Umran lost his military command. Deprived of military backing, Bitar had to resign and the radicals formed a new government which in 1965 unleashed the Ba'th's "socialist transformation."

Massive nationalizations of big business and industry brought the modern heights of the economy into the public sector. A state monopoly over foreign trade was asserted, giving it nominal control over all economic connections to the external market while a similar take-over of wholesale and agricultural marketing agencies threatened to marginalize Syria's large merchant class. Agrarian reform, stalled by the reluctance of the moderates to antagonise the owning classes, was given new impetus. A shopkeepers' strike by Muslim activists and merchants was quickly suppressed and grudging support for the measures won from Nasserites and leftists. This marked the breaking of the economic hegemony of the bourgeoisie (Rabinovich 1972:109–153; ABSP 1972c).

But Aflaq, Bitar and the moderates were not wholly defeated and an intensified intra-regime battle again spread from party councils to the politicised army where, after suffering several setbacks, Aflaq's moderates exploited personal rivalries among senior party officers to win over Amin al-Hafiz who engineered the return of Umran to the high command in a challenge to the radicals and their strongman, Salah Jedid. The moderates again proposed a détente with the urban bourgeoisie and with the liberal and Nasserite middle class, attacked the party's Marxist course and proposed to exclude the radical military from politics. But they had insufficient support in the ranks of the party and army and Jedid and his partisans led a February 1966 military *coup* which ousted Hafiz and the party's historic founders (Aflaq 1971: 187–254; Rabinovich 1972:150–208; Devlin 1976:296–303; Razzaz 1969:120–186; Petran 1972:180–182).

The party moderates, expressing the worldview of the urban middle class, had sought a reformist road to development in which the state could secure the co-operation of capital. The radicals spoke for the

provincial lower middle class and the peasants, who, much more hostile to the urban establishment, sought to demolish its power in a revolution from above. Jedid's coup marked the transformation of the Ba'th, against the wishes of its founding leaders, into a vehicle of plebeian rural revolt, the triumph of social radicalism over liberal unionism. It also marked the victory of the Ba'thi military over Aflaq's effort to regain control of "his" party, the displacement of the Western-educated first generation of leadership by a second generation of Syrian-educated leaders, and the predominance of minorities—Druze, Isma'ilis and above all Alawis—in the Ba'th's ruling circles.

The victory of the radicals, removing the ideological and generational split in the party, brought to the fore an apparently more cohesive political elite presided over by a triumvirate of retired Major-General Salah Jedid who became de facto Syrian party secretary, Dr. Nur ad-Din al-Atasi, who became head of state and Pan-Arab party secretary, and Dr. Yusuf Zuayyin appointed prime minister. A more radical thrust was given to public policy and, in spite of intense opposition and constant factionalism in the regime's own ranks, the dominant radical wing of the party held on for five years, attempting, with mixed results, to entrench the major outlines of its program.

II.
REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE: THE EXPANSION OF POWER

The radical Ba'this attempted, with considerable success, to launch a revolution from above; they used socialist transformation and party organisation to ignite a class war, mobilize popular support, and make Syria's social terrain more congenial to the stabilisation of the regime. They sufficiently expanded power to entrench the Ba'th regime. But they failed to effectively institutionalise the revolution in a state which could sustain their radical course.

A.
Leninism and class conflict

The regime did consolidate a semi-Leninist one-party state. On the one hand, the party apparatus was reconstructed and expanded, given full authority over the state machine, and charged with creating or asserting control over an array of corporatist-like mass organisations —workers and peasant unions, youth and women's organisations— through which the regime attempted to mobilize a constituency. At the same time, most opposition parties and newspapers were repressed, while the professional associations—potential political

vehicles of upper and middle class rivals—were brought under control.

A new more radical thrust was given to the "socialist transformation." In the rural areas, the attitude of the authorities changed from regarding landlords as a respected power to treating them as a class to be broken (Bianquis 1980:81–82; Petran 1972:175); the new peasant union identified and secured the dismissal of leftovers from the old regime in the Ministry of Agrarian Reform who had given advance notice of expropriations to landlords, enabling the latter to dispose of excess land. The new agrarian relations law, now for the first time seriously enforced, increased the share going to peasants in share-cropping contracts and strengthened their security of tenure (Petran 1972:175, 205). Sporadic conflict between peasants and landlords in the countryside reflected the regime's penetration of the village. In the cities, an austere atmosphere of political repression and egalitarian levelling was imposed. Rurals poured into Damascus "in caravans" to make their claims on the spoils of the revolution, increasingly ruralizing the bureaucracy, the army and the universities. Peasants flooded the streets with banners and militant chants to render a sense of legitimacy to the regime and intimidate urban enemies (Khalaf 1981:114). The shift in the demographic balance in the capital aimed at making it possible for the party to entrench itself in Syria's hostile urban environment (Devlin 1983:23, 121).

Opposition to the regime was intense, concentrated among the oligarchy and the *suq,* but more diffusely spread among broad cross-class sectors of urban society. Conservative opinion was alienated by the rule of what it considered uncultured and heterodox rural upstarts. Not only the previously dominant landed oligarchy but merchants of all sizes were made to pay the heaviest costs of Ba'th policies: thus, the state take-over of foreign trade and segments of domestic trade, severe restrictions on imports, and price controls threatened the whole merchant community. University students from urban families, fearing political discrimination, were, by contrast with rurals, pessimistic about their future prospects (Abyad 1968). An "uncompromising secularism which drove religion out of public life" inflamed the ulama and traditional quarters of the cities, historic centres of Muslim piety (Tibawi 1969:420). Concentrated, the city could still mobilize against the regime: thus, in the spring of 1967, merchants, ulama, and other religious protesters took to the streets in major anti-regime disturbances against radical secularism, deeply embarrassing a regime which could ill afford to stir up broad-based Islamic hostility (Petran 1972:197–198). At the same time, however, the new radicalism won the regime more acceptance from elements of

the Communist and Nasserite movements, trade union leaders, and militant nationalist opinion, whose support was crucial to containing the simmering urban rebellion which periodically burst out in anti-regime disturbances: "the Ba'th regime, aided by workers' militias, trade unions and communist militants, succeeded in crushing bourgeois resistance to the new order" (Rouleau 1969: 170).

Meanwhile, party building advanced most thoroughly in the country-side. There, the party recruited a pool of cadres from educated rural youth and active elements of the peasantry to spearhead the extension of the new party and mass organisations into the villages in some of which the party had a pre-1963 presence. They used the implementation of agrarian reform to win over and organise peasants and curb traditional power in the countryside. Similarly, the nationalizations of industry won the worker support needed to bring the trade unions under Ba'thi control. By 1968, the reconstructed party had about 10,000 full members and many more in various stages of candidacy and by the early seventies about 100,000. The party rank and file were over-whelmingly of two roughly equally represented groups: the state dependent new middle class—white collar workers, teachers and students—and workers and peasants. The mobilisation of these new participants gave the regime roots among those social forces which had been least incorporated into the old regime or had paid the costs of capitalist development.

Thus, in true Leninist fashion, the regime narrowed the pluralist distribution of power in the intra-elite arena, while trying to expand the amount of power at its disposal through the mobilisation of new actors at the base of society. In the late sixties, though the base of the Ba'th remained narrow, it was nevertheless deeply rooted, one trunk firmly implanted in the minority communities, a web of smaller but broader roots in hundreds of villages. By the mid-seventies, the party, together with the "mass organisations," had expanded to incorporate from a fourth to a third of the population. This was decisive in consolidating the regime (Hinnebusch 1976; 1990:166–190).

B.
Statist development and social structural levelling

Having little confidence in autonomous development from below and believing Syrian capitalism exhausted, the Ba'th saw the state as the key to a necessary "big push" toward modernisation. The nationalizations gave the state control of the "heights" of the economy and the public sector, guided by a new planning apparatus, was now designated the "leading" force in development and state investment the main source of dynamism. The Second Five Year Plan (1966–

1970) channelled a surge of public investment—largely financed by cheap Eastern Bloc loans and grants—into the economy, checking the slide into economic stagnation from private disinvestment after 1963. It went into an oil and petro-chemical industry, the public industrial sector, including iron and steel factories, into big infrastructural (railroad) and power projects needed to integrate and support economic growth, and into massive irrigation and reclamation projects. The Third Five Year Plan (1971–75) concentrated on the Euphrates Dam project which, viewed as the key to the development of modern agro-industry, was projected to double the irrigated area, absorb excess labour, and provide electricity for agro-industry (Petran 1972:205–217). Moreover, the party looked forward to constructing a new socialist society in the reclaimed lands: the Euphrates basin would be the showcase of Ba'thi agrarian socialism. While agriculture was nominally still largely "private," the regime aimed to incorporate the small and middle peasantry into state-supported co-operatives and while co-operatization took over a decade, by the end of the seventies it had been accomplished. Meanwhile the bourgeoisie, particularly its industrial wing, was confined to small enterprise and deprived of many capital accumulation opportunities (Hinnebusch 1989:176–79; Hinnebusch 1995b: 307).

The regime's social levelling, redistributing opportunity and property, fluidized the formerly rigid class structure and spawned or broadened social forces dependent on or beholden to the Ba'th state. Indicative of enhanced social mobility was the broadening of access to education. Between 1964 and 1977 primary school students and teachers more than doubled, raising the proportion of the school age population attending school from 58 to 85%, and similar increases happened at the intermediate and secondary level. Moreover, access to education became more equalised as between the cities and rural provinces. University education also became a widened channel of advancement; Abyad (1968) reports that enrolment at Damascus University doubled in the five years after the 1963 coup and by 1968 half of its student body was rural in origin and 41% from the lower class, while only 6% had fathers with university education. By the late seventies, new universities in Aleppo, Latakia and Deir ez-Zor, and 25 post-secondary intermediate institutes had been created. Enrolment in universities had grown from 25,600 in 1964 to 109,000 in 1983, plus another 30,000 enrolled abroad. The percentage of rurals with post-primary certificates doubled from less than 10% of the total in 1960 to 20.3% in 1970 and, given the continual expansion in rural access under the Ba'th probably at least doubled again in the seventies. In short, despite the inevitable erosion in the quality of instruction, education became a channel of upward mobility which was not

TABLE 3.1 INDICATORS OF CHANGE IN SYRIAN CLASS STRUCTURE, 1960 TO 1970

	1960		1970	
	#	%	#	%
Industrial & Commercial Bourgeoisie	19,750	2.2	10,890	0.7
Rural Bourgeoisie	39,640	4.5	8,360	0.6
Salaried Middle Class	132,530	15.0	234,930	16.0
Traditional Petty Bourgeoisie	110,900	12.5	216,090	14.7
Working Class	159,720	17.9	257,380	17.6
Small Peasantry	243,460	27.4	608,540	41.5
Agricultural Proletariat	182,720	20.5	130,400	8.9

Source: Adapted from Longuenesse 1979:4. Numbers=economically active population

previously open on a comparable scale (Drysdale 1981a: 102; SAR 1984:92–94, 385).

The diffusion of property and opportunity under the Ba'th's "revolution from above" had a palpable impact on Syria's social structure, captured in figures cited by Longuenesse (1979:4) and supported by other available data (See Table 3.1). First, nationalizations and agrarian reform destroyed the economic bases of the bourgeoisie (and obstructed their re-concentration); not only was its share of national wealth levelled but its numbers fell—from 6.7% of the population in 1960 to 1.3% in 1970—through downward mobility or exit from Syria. Second, the salaried middle class increased by two-thirds from 1960 to 1970 (Longuenesse 1979:4). The enormous increase in the functions and size of the state—the army, bureaucracy, education system and the large public sector—made it a major channel of upward mobility into the middle strata. This was reflected in the enormous growth in the state-dependent classes, including both officials and public sector blue collar workers. Total state employment grew from 22,000 in the late fifties to 250,000 in the seventies, when one in seven persons was state employed and by the eighties it reached 473,285, or one in every five employed (SAR 1984: 88, 94); and this does not include the military. In 1984, there were about 153,000 government officials or employees, 92,000 teachers (not including temporaries) and 130,500 workers in the public industrial sector. The salaried middle and working classes increased from 32.9% of the economically active population in 1960 to 33.6% in 1970 and 37. 8% in 1975 (World Bank 1980: v. 2:90). The classical petite bourgeoisie of small merchants and artisans also expanded, filling the gap left by the demise of the *haute bourgeoisie.* Finally, a significant

portion of the landless agricultural proletariat was transformed into a small holding peasantry: between 1960 and 1970 the former dropped from 20.5% to 8.9% of the population while the latter increased from 27.4% to 41.5% (Longuenesse 1979:4).

Hidden behind these statistics is a still more complex social reality; individuals—and even more so families—tended to bridge social categories. Thus, a public sector worker might "moonlight" as a petty private operator or a peasant work seasonally in a public sector factory. A peasant family might pool resources and one brother work the family land, while another sought government office or public sector work, and a third invested in a petty business. If one considers state employees, small-holding peasants, and blue collar workers with a foot in petty commerce, services or artisanship to fall, in a broad sense, in the petite bourgeoisie, this class appeared to become numerically dominant, and, in the establishment of Ba'thism as the official credo, ideologically ascendant.

Together, the demolishing of the class control of the landed-mercantile bourgeoisie over the economy and the broadening of middle social strata dominated by elements who initially possessed little property and made their careers and fortune through the state, greatly enhanced the weight of those social forces with a stake in the Ba'th's statist course. In the long run, the more fluid and levelled social terrain which resulted from the Ba'th revolution was congenial to the consolidation of a state autonomous of society and unconstrained by a dominant class.

III.
WAR AND THE FALL OF THE RADICALS

The new regime also re-shaped Syria's foreign policy along radical lines, seeking to make Syria the "Hanoi" of an Arab Revolution. It helped arm and train Palestinian fedayeen operating against Israel as part of a new determination to support the "liberation of Palestine." Propaganda was unleashed against conservative pro-Western states and interests in the region and the Western-owned Iraq Petroleum Company's pipeline across Syria was shut down until it raised transit fees paid to Syria. A close alliance was struck with the Soviet Union which began to give Syria significant military, political and economic support. And, in a major diplomatic coup, the regime succeeded in getting Nasser to bury the hatchet and in 1966 Egypt and Syria drew together in a new "progressive axis" for the first time since the UAR.

The radical impetus was, however, cut short by Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, a disaster precipitated by Ba'thist provocations of Israel. In their haste to challenge Israel at a time when neither

Syria—its army decimated by political purges and engrossed in politics —or a disunited Arab world were prepared for war, the radical Ba'thists invited the massive Israeli onslaught. The regime's dismal military performance and the lower priority it seemed to give to defence of the front than to the protection of the regime in Damascus, greatly diminished its nationalist legitimacy. The loss of Quneitra province (the Golan Heights) in the war became a permanent reproach to the Ba'th. The defeat demoralised the party rank and file and, gravely weakening the radicals' leadership, provided the conditions for an intra-party challenge to them. This watershed event in modern Arab history checked and began the gradual reversal of Syria's political radicalisation.

The defeat split the regime over how to cope with its consequences. The radical triumvirate wanted to deepen the revolution domestically (e.g. by further land reform) while refusing any political settlement with Israel and continuing support for the Palestinian guerrilla challenge to it. But their policies invited Israeli reprisals and imposed a permanent state of war and heavy defence burdens, while isolating Syria from crucial external resources and support it would need to sustain such a course. The Arab oil states were ready to bankroll the military reconstruction of the front-line states but only in return for an end to the ideological warfare the radicals promoted; Egypt under Nasser accepted a political settlement (UN 242) while Syria's Soviet ally, urging the same, was unwilling to back the Syrian army in a continuing confrontation with Israel.

Thus a newly "realist" wing of the regime arose under the Defence Minister, General Hafiz al-Asad, calling for suspension of the revolution in the interest of national—Syrian and all-Arab—unity aimed at recovery of the lost territories. Asad first challenged the radical triumvirate at the party's 4th Regional Congress in 1968 where he insisted that the military build-up needed for recovery of the Golan had to be the regime's first priority. This required détente with the conservative Arab monarchies which alone could finance it and with hostile Jordan and Iraq whose armies were needed in a joint "Eastern Front." Against this, the radicals argued that all Arab resources could never be mobilised without a Pan-Arab revolution and that concentration on recovery of the Golan would lead to giving up on the liberation of Palestine. The two sides were to split over domestic policy as well. By 1969, Syria suffered from an economic malaise manifest in scarcities from foreign exchange shortages and agricultural instability from uncompleted land reform aggravated by bad crop weather; at the same time, the state had urgent need of revenues for military re-construction. Asad's partisans proposed limited economic liberalisation to appease the private sector and

stimulate the economy; for example, they wanted to rent out vast undistributed state lands to entrepreneurs—a course anathema to the radicals.

At the 1968 congress Asad gave in on policy changes but won an end to "political interference" in the army—in essence to party control over his right to rebuild the army and re-integrate officers purged for political reasons as he saw fit. Neither side, however, really accepted this compromise: the radicals tried to neutralise Asad's supporters in the party organisation while he built up his faction in the army at their expense and used it to interfere in party affairs. The radicals tried to develop the party-sponsored Palestinian organisation, *al-Sa'iqa,* into an armed force able to counter Asad's tanks, while he quietly courted second rank party apparatchiki. An emergency party congress called in 1969 to resolve this crisis led to another ineffectual compromise, a new government in which the two factions were to share power. In actuality, a virtual "duality of power" left a vacuum of authority in which corruption and clientele networks proliferated. Gradually the balance of power in the regime shifted toward Asad. The defeat had undermined faith in the radical course in the party while Asad's proposals seemed to offer a way to acquire needed economic resources. Asad also won the tacit support of the bourgeoisie and many wavering middle rank party leaders, while his opponents were reduced to control of the party apparatus and the support of trade unionists and leftist intellectuals (Petran 1972:195–204, 239–248; Seymour 1970; Kerr 1975; Van Dam 1981:83–97; ABSP 1970; Torrey 1970).

The duality of power came to a head as a result of "Black September" of 1970 when the radicals ordered military intervention in Jordan in defence of Palestinian fedayeen under attack by King Hussein. When Asad, deterred by US and Israeli threats, refused to commit air power in support of Syrian tanks, allowing Jordan to rout them, and then ordered a series of military transfers neutralising the last military supporters of the radicals, the party leadership called an emergency party congress and dismissed him and his ally, Chief of Staff Mustafa Tlas, from their posts. Asad responded with a military coup deposing the radicals and bringing his own faction to sole power. Despite their control of the party apparatus and its "popular organisations," the radicals could do nothing but mobilize ineffectual demonstrations: when the legitimacy of party institutions and the holders of coercive power were confronted in the starkest fashion, the latter triumphed.

IV.
FLAWED STATE BUILDING: THE LIMITS OF INSTITUTIONALISATION

The radical Ba'th left behind a stronger more autonomous state than the fragile entity it had seized in 1963. A set of ruling institutions had been forged which consolidated power and partially "routinized" an ideological preference for etatist solutions, a deep distrust of private capital and a residual populism which would not quickly dissipate. However, in key respects, the outcome of the regime's efforts was not to be the revolutionary state its architects ostensibly intended.

A.
Institution-building and intra-regime politics

Institutionalising the revolution encountered major obstacles from the outset. As a result of the organisational dissolution under the UAR, the Ba'th Party came to power as a number of rival factions, divided by generation, region, and sectarian affiliation and without an authoritative leadership: elders such as Aflaq had some legitimacy, but little power at their command, while the military committee had power but little legitimacy. The attempt fill this power vacuum by institutionalising authority in a Leninist party-state centre had only very modest success.

To be sure, collegial party institutions were established and all factions gave lip service to the principle that "objective party relations" - the rules of democratic-centralism—should settle political conflicts. Elected congresses would set policy and select and renew collegial leadership bodies by majority vote; these leadership bodies would carry out congress resolutions through specialised offices and a chain of command to lower level party branches and cells. The state would be a mere arm of the party and partisans holding state office were to be bound by party discipline. Likewise, Ba'thi military officers were entitled to participate in party policy-making assemblies but, in return, would be subject to party discipline.

The actual outcome, however, was not institutionalised authority, but a certain duality between authority and power. On the one hand, party institutions acquired some legitimacy. Party congresses became important arenas in which factions fought it out and sometimes reached compromises and without the legitimation acquired through party institutions neither contenders nor their policies could normally prevail. But party legitimacy was undermined by rival factions' use and abuse of sometimes vague or contested party procedures for factional advantage. For example, because the party was still re-

constructing itself, the admission of new members could shift the balance of party opinion. As such, competitors manoeuvred to flood party ranks, hence manipulate elections and pack assemblies with clients and followers, while seeking to prevent opponents from doing likewise and purging their clients. Also, the crucial authority relation between the party's all-Arab "National" *(qaumi)* leadership organs and its subordinate yet autonomous Syrian "Regional" *(qutri)* organs—notably the conditions under which the technically superior *quami* bodies could "dissolve" the *qutri* organisation—was vague; their control by rival factions in the 1963–66 power struggle resulted in several "constitutional crises" in which the relation of the two institutional bodies was sharply contested. The legitimacy of outcomes of the political process, when they resulted from perceived abuse of the rules or when the rules themselves were under dispute, was often rejected by losing factions.

Moreover, the assumption of power by military coup and the leading political roles of active-duty officers, combined with this fragile institutionalisation meant no credible or decisive hand could be played in party politics without a secure base of military support. Thus, a military politics of transfer, dismissal, appointment, and coalition-building in the army ran parallel to party politics. Because only Ba'thi officers—as opposed to civilian Ba'thists or non-Ba'thi officers—could play a credible hand in both party and military arenas, they were uniquely situated as political contenders and every major successful party faction was championed by an officer-politician. In the end, when disputes could not be resolved in party institutions, the resort to competitive military mobilisation proved decisive and the coalition which commanded superior force prevailed: indeed, the two main instances of major leadership change—that of 1966 from the "moderates" to the "radicals" and that of 1970 from the radical triumvirate to the new Asad pragmatists—took place by military coup. The Leninist subordination of the gun to the party—to ideology and legality—was never achieved, and hence a powerful current of praetorianism persisted underneath the fragile shell of institutional legitimacy and procedure built to contain it.

Since procedural legitimacy remained so precarious and the authority of leaders and their bases of support remained very insecure, political rivals were driven to build maximum coalitions by exploiting every available tie and cleavage: personal, generational, social class, regional and, above all, sectarian. Amidst such insecurity and in a fragmented society where sectarianism and localism were historically deep-rooted, blocs tended to form among those who felt a greater degree of mutual trust, i.e., often those from the same region and/or sect: hence Alawis, Hauranis, Druzes, etc. tended to stick

together and support each other. At the same time, though, only cross-sectarian alliances could normally sustain a winning coalition. Thus, rival coalitions were built of a multitude of ties and were fluid, shifting with circumstance and issue, rather than solid primordial "blocs" and, in the major 1966 and 1970 showdowns the opposing camps were cross-sectarian, civil-military coalitions at odds over power and ideology (Rabinovich 1972; Devlin 1976; Razzaz 1967; Seymour 1970).

B.
Sectarian politics and minority dominance

Although sectarianism was not an end in itself, contenders in intra-regime power struggles nevertheless exploited sectarianism: thus, in 1966 the ideologically moderate General Amin al-Hafiz, a Sunni, exploited Sunni resentment of minority dominance while Jedid, an Alawi, used minority fear of Sunni resentment to rally his radical followers. The initial disproportionate representation of sectarian minorities in the party elite was reinforced by the purges inevitably inflicted on the losers in power struggles and the tendency for the victors—Alawis in each main showdown—to put trusted followers, often fellow sectarians, in key posts. This narrowed sectarian representation in the elite and further stimulated sectarian politics. Thus, as early as September 1966, the radical coalition began to seriously fray when several Druze officers who had participated in the 1966 coup, feeling themselves excluded from the inner circles of power, joined with dissidents still loyal to the ousted party moderates in an attempted coup with Jordanian backing. Because elements of the party branch in the Jabal Druze joined in the rebellion, and because major Druze partisans were purged in its aftermath and the Druze, as a major military component of the regime, were largely decimated, the split took on a clear sectarian dimension, and enhanced Alawi predominance in the regime (Be'eri 1970:166–169; Van Dam 1981:67–78). In the struggle between Asad and Jedid, both camps were, of course, led by Alawi officers and cut across sectarian lines. But Asad's consolidation of power enhanced Alawi predominance at the centre.

Nevertheless, the incorporation into the state of the Alawis, the historically most downtrodden of Syria's social forces, gave Ba'thi socialism a kind of surrogate proletariat with nothing to lose from the radical changes the Ba'th was carrying out. Thus, the apocryphal assertions of Alawi officers that socialism allowed the rural minorities to "impoverish the town" (Be'eri 1970:337) just as capitalism operated to the advantage of the Sunni city, reflected a very real social reality: a land-poor impoverished community, possessing nothing but its drive

for education and careers, had everything to gain from a state-dominated economy which would divert the control of opportunities from the private bourgeoisie. But the Ba'th revolution would also differentially benefit wider sectors of the lower classes and not just Alawis.

C.
The limits of mobilisation and the Ba'thist "Thermidor"

However, the Ba'th party never attained the mobilizational power to sustain a thorough social revolution. Revolution cannot readily be made "from above" without a large cadre of disciplined party militants, tested before the power seizure by long periods of personal risk which separates out the opportunists and waverers. Too many of those drawn after 1963 to a party in power were careerists or prepared to abuse power for personal or group gain (ABSP 1969). As a result, the Ba'th as a revolutionary organisation rapidly ran out of steam.

As such, the Ba'th never developed sufficient mass mobilizational capacity to submerge intense urban opposition and Syria was thus split between a plebeian rural regime and a higher-status led urban opposition. This is an anomaly that cannot be indefinitely sustained. The city remained a formidable power, wealthier, more culturally advanced, and barely under regime control. The money and skills of its upper and middle classes were essential to Syria's development especially since the public sector was insufficiently strong to displace private capitalism as an engine of accumulation and production. Moreover, the cost of attempting to displace the bourgeoisie was high. While the Leninist thrust quickly lost its capacity to drive change, its totalitarian-like narrowing of autonomous associational life and of independent bases of economic power, in damaging and subordinating civil society, depressed alternative sources of development energies and left little check on the temptation of state elites to abuse their power.

At this impasse, the Ba'th experiment seemed to replicate the life cycle of revolutions, that is, the "Jacobin" excesses of the radicals precipitated the rise of a Bonapart-like nationalist general who promised an end to internal conflict, defence of the nation against foreign enemies, and a new more liberal post-revolutionary order. Hafiz al-Asad would reshape the state to serve his own priorities, chiefly the contest with Israel. This would require rectifying two major vulnerabilities of the radical Ba'th's strategy through a domestic policy of reconciliation with the city and "a realist" foreign policy to counter the Israeli threat.

Chapter 4
POWER AND POLITICS UNDER ASAD

I.
ASAD IN POWER: THE "CORRECTIVE MOVEMENT"

The Ba'thist faction Hafiz al-Asad brought to power in 1970 was initially indistinguishable in social composition from his radical rivals: both were petit bourgeois, cross-sectarian, civil-military coalitions led by Alawi political generals. But each was supported by distinct segments of society: the radicals by leftist intellectuals and trade unionists, Asad by senior army officers and the bourgeoisie. In fact, Asad's rise marked the victory of the military over the radical intelligentsia. Asad's aim was to consolidate the unstable Ba'th state and mobilize Syria for a war to recover the lost territories. In the process, he turned the Ba'th state from an instrument of class revolution into a machinery of power in the service of raison d'etat.

At the 1971 Eleventh National Congress, Asad led an ideological and policy revision. He insisted that the regime had no intention of changing the "nationalist socialist line" and characterised his coup as a "corrective movement" within the revolution which would merely restore it to the true path. However, instead of revolution, the objective "for the advancement of which all resources and manpower [would be] mobilised [was to be] the liberation of the occupied territories" (ABSP 1971). This change in priorities dictated major alterations in the course of the Ba'thist state. To be sure, Asad's foreign policy prioritised alignment with Egypt, a necessary partner in any war to recover the Golan and continued close alliance with the Soviet Union, needed to back Syria's military build-up. But acquiring the resources to support war preparation required détente with several former enemies. An alliance was struck with the conservative Arab oil states who provided financial resources in return for an end to Syria's effort to export revolution. The Syrian bourgeoisie had also to be appeased and, in a bid to mobilize the private enterprise needed

to break out of economic stagnation as well as attract Arab investment, economic policy was liberalised, paring back state controls over foreign trade and imports, although without prejudice to the dominant overall role of the state (Hinnebusch 1984a: 305–308). This encouraged the re-activation of the dormant private sector which, together with improved agricultural weather, produced an economic recovery in the early seventies.

Asad's policies broadened the base of the Ba'th regime. A purge of radical leaders swept the party, but most rank and file Ba'this chose accommodation with the new leadership which continued to expand the party's organised mass base; Asad thus maintained the core of the regime. At the same time, a new People's Assembly (parliament) was formed, into which a spectrum of opinion going beyond the regime's core constituency was co-opted. This, plus economic liberalisation, the opening to conservative Arab states, a muting of radical secularism, Asad's public deportment as a pious Muslim, and a palpable political relaxation, all helped win the acquiescence of sections of bourgeois and conservative middle class opinion in Ba'th rule. Important elements of the "progressive opposition"—Nasserites, Communists, Arab Socialists—were also co-opted into a National Progressive Front in which the dominant Ba'th promised to consult with them and accorded them a share of state office; Asad's détente with Sadat's Egypt went far to win the co-operation of the Nasserite factions. All these measures were designed to appease and accommodate urban society to Ba'th rule (Kerr 1975; Petran 1972: 249–257; Seale 1988: 169–83).

The limits of this accommodation were sharply underlined by major disturbances which broke out at the 1973 unveiling of a new constitution which preserved the "leading" role of the Ba'th Party in the political system and which failed to designate Islam as the religion of the state. Although Asad conceded a change specifying Islam as the religion of the president—while insisting on his own disputed credentials as a Muslim—the protests had to be forcibly repressed (Kelidar 1974). This souring of state-urban relations was, however, checked by the outbreak of the October 1973 war with Israel which rallied Syrians behind their government. Because of the regime's creditable military performance and the new diplomatic stature it gave Syria, the war won the regime a significant fund of nationalist legitimacy. Moreover, the large wartime oil price rises benefited Syria which received sharply increased aid transfers from the Arab oil states. The economic boom sparked by the influx of these funds and a wave of migration for high-paying jobs in the Gulf also helped accommodate Syrians to the regime, especially those best positioned to profit—merchants, middle class professionals and skilled workers

(Perthes 1995:135–36). By the mid-seventies it appeared that Asad's "corrective movement" had, indeed, consolidated the formerly unstable Ba'th state.

II.
POWER CONCENTRATION

A.
Presidential monarchy

Asad used the initiative he seized in 1970 and the political capital accumulated thereafter to reshape the Ba'th state—from a failed experiment in Leninism into a hybrid regime which subordinated the Ba'th Party to an authoritarian "Presidential Monarchy." The new priority put on state consolidation over revolution and awareness of the factional fragility of collegial leadership led the new elite to explicitly opt for a strong presidential regime. Asad made the presidency the undisputed command post of the Ba'th state and, through it, concentrated personalised authority in his hands. He held the reins of the three major power institutions, leading the party as its general secretary, and, in his capacity as president, enjoying full powers to appoint and dismiss governments and military commanders. The new constitutional structures he created were modelled on Gaullist France, in which the prime minister was the president's lieutenant charged with carrying out his policies and parliament was a distinctly subordinate institution.

Asad's ascendance was built on several bases. The regime had already achieved autonomy of the dominant classes by breaking their monopoly over the means of production and mobilising workers and peasants through the Ba'th party. After 1970, Asad attained autonomy from each of the groups in his power base by balancing them against each other: he initially used his army base to free himself from party ideological constraints. Then, he built up a "jama'a" of Alawi personal followers, often his kin, appointed to crucial security and military commands which gave him enhanced autonomy of the wider Ba'thized military (Kienle 1992; Perthes 1995:146–154). Yet, also anxious to placate urban Sunnis, especially Damascenes, he also deliberately co-opted significant numbers of them into the top ranks of the party and many non-party technocrats into the government. Limited economic liberalisation enabled him to foster a state-dependent new bourgeoisie and forge an alliance with a section of the Damascene private bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie represented a fourth pillar of support that lightened Asad's dependence on the others. Asad

thus attained autonomy within the state by balancing between the regime's "centres of power" (Dawisha 1978a) and autonomy of society by balancing statist and private sector interests.

As the president became the main source of initiative in the regime, his personality, values, strengths and weaknesses became decisive for its direction and stability. Arguably Asad's leadership gave the regime an enhanced combination of consistency and flexibility which it hitherto lacked. The consistency of his policy was rooted in his political socialisation into an authentically Ba'thist world view, for his origins and career faithfully reflected on a personal level the saga of the Ba'th: from a peasant family, he became a Ba'thi leader in secondary school, then joined the air force where as a young officer and partisan he helped the party seize power. Equally important he experienced the trauma of presiding, as defence minister, over the devastating defeat in 1967 and thereafter became obsessed with the recovery of Syria's land and honour.

Determined, intelligent and dedicated to his mission, Asad proved extremely stubborn in pursuit of nationalist principle in the conflict with Israel. A tough Machiavellian, he seemed willing to use any means in the regional power struggle and to defend his regime. Yet, as a pragmatic realist he was also prepared to subordinate ideology to the realities of power, hence to moderate Ba'thism to accommodate the interests of the bourgeoisie at home and Arab donors abroad. Moreover, unlike the Ba'th radicals who challenged powerful interests regardless of the consequences, Asad's policy was marked by caution, patient consistency and incremental adjustments to changing circumstances (Maoz 1975, 1978; Seale 1988).

Asad was, moreover, seemingly the main source of initiative and accountability in the regime. A workaholic, he was famous for his marathon working sessions; for example, he personally negotiated seven straight hours with US Secretary of State Baker over the conditions of the Madrid peace conference. At home, he kept his finger on the pulse of the regime, telephoning members of the elite even in the middle of the night to call them to account (Seale 1988:340–44).

Finally, Asad's personal stature became a regime asset. To be sure, as a habitually secretive behind the scenes leader uncomfortable with a populist style, Asad never developed the charisma of a Nasser. But over time he built up a public stature, unique among regime elites, winning grudging respect, even from many who hated the regime, for his personal honesty and for the relative stability at home and greater effectiveness abroad which his rule delivered. Most Syrians, especially the generation that never knew any other ruler, came to see no alternative to the President.

The price of this enhanced stability and effectiveness was the patrimonialization of the state centre. Whatever collegial institutional underpinning Ba'th party leadership organs may have once provided, the personalization of power in the presidency enervated it. As ideology faded as a political cement, Asad increasingly tolerated corruption while surrounding himself with pliant figures. These men, unable to acquire wealth through modest official salaries, were allowed to enrich themselves on commission taking or smuggling, giving them an illicit stake in the regime, and while Asad occasionally removed the most corrupt, this, at best, set limits to the scale of corruption that would be tolerated. This practice also meant that there were few, if any, leaders of independence or stature to lead and strengthen the other institutions of state around the presidency. And, as the official cult of personality became pervasive, scope for debate over Asad's policies, whether within or outside of ruling circles, steadily narrowed (Seale 1988:455–59; Sadowski 1985; Wadeen 1999).

B.
Elite composition: Alawi rule?

The Syrian regime is often referred to by its critics as a minority, or more specifically, an Alawi regime. Indeed, Asad's strategy of power consolidation, in relying on kin and tribe, necessarily enhanced Alawi predominance and while sectarian *asabiya* has always played some role in buttressing various regimes—before the Alawis it was the Druzes, the Hamawis, the Kurds—under Asad it reached unprecedented proportions. The subordination of the Ba'th party's collegial leadership bodies to an Alawi president buttressed by an Alawi coercive apparatus accountable only to himself represented a significant increase in Alawi power. The Alawi officers around Asad who came, appropriately, to be termed "barons," were pivotal because, as personal kinsmen or clients of the president they combined privileged access to him with positions in the party and control of the levers of coercion. They were, therefore, in an unrivalled position to act as political brokers and, especially in times of crisis, were uniquely placed to shape outcomes.

Until the early eighties, the President's brother, Rifat al-Asad, commanding the Defence Detachments *(al-saraya al-difa'),* was the foremost regime baron. Adnan al-Asad headed the Struggle Companies which controlled access routes to the capital and guarded its command posts, while Asad's son-in-law Adnan Makhluf commanded the Presidential Guard. Ali Haydar headed the Special Forces, used against domestic as well as external enemies and Ibrahim al-Ali the

militia-like Popular Army. Muhammed al-Khuli, the head of the intelligence coordinating committee in the presidency was perhaps Asad's most trusted lieutenant while Ali Duba, head of military intelligence, proved one of the most durable regime barons. Asad's Alawi clients also held a very disproportionate number of top operational commands, especially of coup-making armoured units; General Shafiq Fayyad, long commander of the critical Third Division, was a durable Asad loyalist, while two other Alawi generals, Ibrahim Safi and Adnan Badr Hasan, had extended tenure as commanders of the First and Ninth Divisions. In the late nineties, Alawi General Ali Aslan replaced the Sunni general, Hikmat al-Shihabi, as chief of staff (Batatu 1981; Seale 1988:181, 428–437; Drysdale 1979; Perthes 1995:150–151).

If Alawi Ba'thists initially played the role of a surrogate proletariat in the radicalisation of the Ba'th, by the seventies, the Alawi "barons" around Asad had been transformed into a privileged elite with . links to the Alawi community. With a national core to provide leadership, Alawi identity and cohesion was enhanced and Alawis in power often followed the code of a kinship society in favouring their kin in recruitment, and, most significantly, in admission to the officer corps. The resentment of those left out naturally accentuated consciousness of their own, usually Sunni, identity which, in turn, heightened the Alawis' solidarity in defence of their privileges. The use by the Alawi community of the army, police and public sector to get out of the village and advance their fortunes gave them a stake in preserving the dominant roles of state institutions over the private market where the Sunni bourgeoisie retained power. In such a climate, class identities tended to be superseded by sectarianism which became most salient during the challenge of the Muslim brotherhood (1976–82) to what it called an "Alawi regime." In this period, inter-sectarian tensions displaced ideological conflicts within the regime elite itself, with Sunni Ba'thists more prepared to accommodate opposition opinion than Alawi hard-liners.

But it is a mistake to think that the regime was exclusively an Alawi one or that Alawi dominance translated exclusively into a politics of sectarian privilege and rivalry. The top elite remained a cross-sectarian coalition. Having taken power through alliances with senior Sunni military officers and party politicos—men such as Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Hikmat al-Shihabi, Naji Jamil, Abdullah al-Ahmar, and Mustafa Tlas, Asad, initially at least, had to share power with them. He took pains not to be identified as leader of an Alawi block in the regime, deliberately co-opted prestigious Sunnis into the party and state machinery, and stood above and balanced between elites of different sectarian backgrounds. To a considerable extent, power in

the top elite came to be shared by two dominant groups, the Alawi officers in the president's inner core and the Damascene Sunnis with their crucial connections to the Sunni business community.

Secondly, the composition of the second ranks of the elite remained cross-sectarian. Thus, in the powerful military party leadership Sunnis (43.4%) and Alawis (37.7%) shared power, while in the council of ministers (government cabinet), the representation of religious communities was, though still under-representative of the majority Sunnis, more closely proportional to their shares of population: thus from 1963–1978, Sunnis held 58.2% of positions, Alawites 20%, Druzes 10.6%, Isma'ilis 6.5%, and Christians 4.7% (Van Dam 1981: 126–129). Nor were provincial Sunnis squeezed out: indeed in the late eighties, many Sunni Ba'this from provincial Dera emerged at the top of the party and state pyramids.

Third, Alawi politicians had multiple identities beside sect, including ideology and profession. Some Sunnis view the Alawis as a secretive solidarity network taking orders from their shaikhs, but, in reality, intra-Alawi conflict, such as the Jedid-Asad rivalry, has been endemic and the Alawis are increasingly socially differentiated (Drysdale 1979; Maoz 1976:277–278; Van Dusen 1975:141–151). At the top is a handful of powerful and wealthy regime barons, some of whom live parasitically off the state or as brokers between it and the private sector; they head clientele networks of propertyless and marginal Alawi youth - literally a lumpenproletariat—who left their villages in large numbers, joining en-masse the regime's multiple security militias. Others of the Alawi political elite are respected for their competence and service to the state; e.g. General Ali Aslan, the deputy chief of staff for years, is a respected officer while several Alawi technocrats were moving forces behind public sector industries. Indeed, between the barons and the Alawi lumpenproletariat, the Alawis produced a liberal minded stratum of professionals—doctors, economists, intellectuals, some of whom disdain to live off state patronage (Batatu 1981; Faksh 1984:137, 143–147).

To be sure, in times of acute sectarian conflict, the interests of "modern" and "traditional" Alawi elites may have converged in defence of the whole community: president and shaikhs were reputed to have met in communal conclave in Asad's village of Qirdahah during the Islamic uprising (Kramer 1987:251). However, normally, clientele networks cut across sectarian lines, with rival Alawi brokers each having Sunni allies or followings of Sunni clients. Moreover, public policy and expenditure has not been confessionally or regionally biased in favour of Alawi Latakia (Perthes 1995:184–85). Nor are the Alawi tribes effective units of political action. And, although the regime has seemed to be colonised by the Alawi mafia around Asad, in fact

the regime's complexity worked against single sect rule: thus, even the most blatant practitioner of sectarianism, Rifat al-Asad, built alliances to the Sunni bourgeoisie, professional middle class, and party apparatus, aware that no simple Alawi solidarity can rule Syria.

Only when Alawi and non-Alawi members of the power elite amalgamate with the various fractions of the new and old Sunni bourgeoisies into a dominant class with a stake in the regime is the sectarian cleavage likely to be neutralised by class solidarity at the top, but this process is slow and covert. Inter-marriages between Alawis and the old aristocracy or the commercial bourgeoisie are the exception. One obstacle to broad intermarriage is that many of the Alawi elite are of the first generation in power and have village wives; however, by the nineties, their children, going into business with Sunni partners and having been raised privileged, lacked their parents' fear of the bourgeoisie and may seek and be accepted into it through marriages on a wider scale.

Resentment of Alawi dominance remains the main source of the regime's legitimacy deficit, not just because so many in the elite are Alawi but because so many flaunt their privilege and seeming immunity from the law. Yet Alawi solidarity constitutes an indispensable shield of the regime: their disproportionate benefit from the regime and fear of the revenge they could face if it fell gives them a strong stake in its survival while, as the 1982 repression at Hama showed, they have the coercive force and will to defend it without restraint. Such *asabiya* both substitutes for and undermines the formation of legitimate institutions at the state centre.

III.
POWER AND POLICY

A.
High policy: president in command

Decision-making in matters of major *high policy,* that is, defence and foreign affairs, grand economic strategy, and issues of internal security, is made by the President and an inner circle of key leaders. The power elites around Asad, at least initially, were not quite mere staff whom he could dismiss or ignore at will and, compared to the pre-1970 era, there was remarkably little turnover in their ranks. None, however, developed durable independent bases of powers. Of Asad's lieutenants, Vice President Khaddam had the most balanced combination of power assets: Asad's oldest party comrade, he had

substantial party seniority, connections to the Alawi power brokers and alliances within the army. Top generals such as Hikmat al-Shihabi and Mustafa Tlas enjoyed exceptional length of tenure at the top, though they exercised power more as trusted lieutenants of the president than as representatives of a military or Sunni constituency. The Alawi barons are uniquely powerful in matters of regime security.

Asad appears to have been sensitive to and restrained by the opinions of senior colleagues in the taking of pivotal decisions and took pains to establish a consensus on them. He seemed, in fact, to preside over a consensual team whose solidarity was rooted in a common interest in protecting the legitimacy, resources, capabilities, and territorial integrity of the state—in a word, raison d'etat. Nevertheless, Asad always had the last—and frequently the first—word on how these interests were to be protected and he decided who to include in the consultative process. As his stature rose over time, the elite were reduced from colleagues to lieutenants. No member of the elite challenged the consensus Asad led and remained in power; the ease of dismissal of General Naji Jamil, a long time Sunni collaborator of Asad who fell out with him at the time of the Islamic rebellion, suggests how far this is the case (Seale 1988: 324; Perthes 1995:182)

B.
The military elite: praetorian guard, interest group

Since 1970, the military has, to a degree, been subordinated to the presidency but it remains the most powerful actor which, particularly in times of crisis, has the potential to shape outcomes. Yet, far from being a monolith, it is differentiated into three distinct but overlapping groups: the Alawi security barons in Asad's inner circle, Ba'thist officers, and professional officers.

While Asad's *jama'a* of barons gave him a personal power base, paradoxically, they were also the main potential threat to him. To be sure, normally divided and lacking public legitimacy, they were not individually well positioned to challenge him and when some showed signs of turning their establishments into personal fiefdoms, Asad removed them or divided their responsibilities. The multiple intelligence agencies they headed watched each other as well as the opposition (Perthes 1995:153–54).

Alone among them, however, the president's brother, Rifat al-Asad did try to build an independent base of power and dared to challenge the president's policies, with disastrous consequences for regime cohesion. Using his unequalled connection to the president and his praetorian guard units as a base, he first tried to extend clientele

networks across state and society—to Alawi clients, to the bourgeoisie and to sections of the professional middle class which he organised in a university graduates league. He resorted to the most traditional of power building strategies in the Muslim world, multiple marriages to various powerful families, building in this and other ways connections to forces which were, at one time or another, historic opponents of the regime: the Lebanese Maronites, the Saudis, even the Americans. Rifat's bid for power was not just at the expense of the two main power institutions of the regime, the army and party, but in time appeared accompanied by efforts to promote an alternative "rightist"—pro-Western, pro-bourgeois—ideological agenda opposed to the dominant Ba'thist thrust. He even dared to break the consensus on foreign policy, seemingly objecting to Syria's alliance with Iran against Iraq.

The showdown came in 1984 when the president fell ill and Rifat positioned himself to take power while the rest of the power elite coalesced against him, including the Alawi military headed by Shafiq Fayyad. Military factions deployed their forces in the streets and bloodshed was seemingly avoided only when the President recovered and threw his authority against Rifat. But the offence taken by the army, and behind it the party, was also central to Rifat's undoing—a manifestation of the power of bureaucratic interests opposed to the most potent of clientele networks. The rise of Rifat's alternative power base, outside formal institutions and led from a wing of the "royal family," so to speak, bears all the marks of a patrimonial polity. The subsequent break-up of Rifat's praetorian guard curbed his sprawling clientalist "state within a state," yet furthered the centrality and autonomy of the presidency—as the only "pole holding up the tent" (Seale 1988:421–440; Drysdale 1984).

While the barons were the key actors, the Ba'th party's other military members continued to send delegates to party congresses and the most senior sat in the central committee and Regional Command (Devlin 1983:59). Although there is no evidence that they were an ideologically minded group, such senior politicised officers still manoeuvred to insert allies and clients into party and government and ambitious civilian politicians in turn sought their backing.

The professional officer corps, long represented in the president's inner circle by men such as Chief of Staff Hikmat al-Shihabi, was a powerful corporate interest group uniquely powerful on issues of war and peace in a country in a state of perpetual war-preparation. If its budget is any indicator, it enjoyed the priority access to resources needed to maintain capabilities in the arms race with Israel. Ex-officers continued to be appointed to ministries and public companies. Military enterprises, which also entered the civilian market for

commodities and construction, gave the military elite a stake in the statist economy (Drysdale 1979:372; Picard 1988).

C.
Bureaucratic politics: actors and issues

In times of "ordinary politics," the President has allowed many lesser matters to be decided within the institutions of the Ba'th state. Central to this "bureaucratic politics" was a certain rivalry between the party and government bureaucracies. The party apparatus, which tended to represent the regime's initial rural constituency, viewed its mission as the defence of Ba'th ideology and tenaciously resisted the diffusion of power to the government bureaucracy, more the preserve of liberal-minded technocrats and the urban middle class. However, increasingly, sectoral or regional rivalries over budgets and resources have cut across this divide, with, for example, party and state officials in industry pitted against those in agriculture or those from one province against another. Associational interest groups—the worker, peasant and professional syndicates—are also players of bureaucratic politics.

Much bureaucratic politics centres on the implementation of policy, particularly the struggle over budgets and jurisdictions, often played out in the party's senior executive organ, the regional command, in the cabinet or in planning agencies. Much of elite politics was ultimately about the competition of rival clientalist networks, often cutting across institutional lines, to corner public resources and dispense patronage to followers. For example, opposing coalitions of Alawi barons, high state officials and supplier agents battled for control over the awarding of contracts and the commissions at stake in them.

The president monitored bureaucratic politics in a kind of government by telephone from the presidential palace, normally only intervening when things went wrong or to settle disputes and break stalemates within the elite (Seale 1988:340–44). This fragmented policy process little accords with the notion of a state bourgeoisie pursuing a coherent class interest and is more consistent with the idea of a "Bonapartist" ruler standing above and exploiting the rivalries of those below. However, the consequences of the process—the use of power to get wealth and wealth to influence power—is compatible with the longterm consolidation of a "new class."

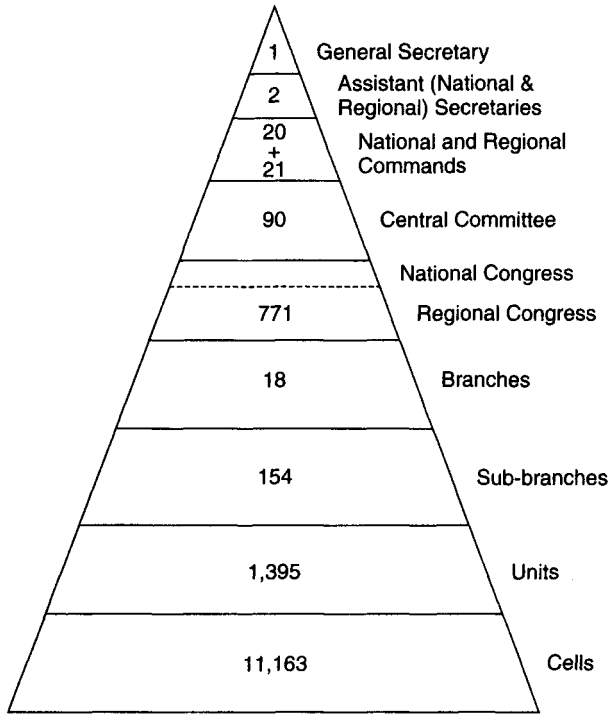


Figure 4.1 Structure of the Ba'th Party (Numbers indicate amount of lower organizational units and membership of higher organs.)

D.
Arenas of bureaucratic politics

Bureaucratic politics took place chiefly in two overlapping arenas, the party leadership organs and the government council of ministers.

1. Party Leadership Organs: The supreme policy-making body in the party (between congresses) was officially a joint session of the National and Regional Commands, which acted as the regime's "politburo." Since 1971, President Asad has led both commands, uniting in his hands the powers of General Secretary *(al-amin al-'amm)* and Regional Secretary; there were also assistant secretaries for each command. The Regional Command, the main authority for governing Syria, officially nominated the president and through him appointed the cabinet. Attached to the command were specialised offices responsible for internal party administration (the organisation and finance bureaux), for the corporatist "popular organisations," and for various functional domains (bureaux for peasants and agriculture, economy, education, workers, youth, etc.). The National Command, a

kind of Ba'thist "comintern," was chiefly responsible for party doctrine and for relations with foreign and Arab political parties.

These commands were, in principle, elected by and responsible to their respective congresses. The Syrian regional congress was, in practice, dominant while the technically superior National Congress was little more than a later session of the Regional Congress which, with the addition of delegates from Ba'thi organisations outside Syria (e.g. Lebanon, Palestinians), deliberated on Arab and foreign policy. Since 1985, party congresses, in abeyance, have been superseded by a smaller more elite body, the party central committee (Hinnebusch 1990:167–68) (See Figure 4.1).

Membership in the party commands, which are superior to the council of ministers, constituted the summit of power below the presidency and the military elite. As the Ba'th was increasingly subordinated to the Presidency, however, high party office, per se, no longer necessarily gave real power. The few strong party politicians were those able to combine other assets with party office. For example, Izz ad-Din Nasser, on the Regional Command since the 1980s, was an Alawi with connections in the military and a forceful personality, who headed (and strengthened) the trade union federation, through which he wielded influence in the public sector and was seen by private business as a major opponent. Suleiman Qaddah, the Assistant Regional Secretary for much of the eighties and nineties, held a superior office but lacked a comparable personal power base.

Party organs nevertheless gave a certain institutional dimension to policy making. The Regional Command operated as a middle level policy making organ, formulating, within Presidential guidelines, concrete socio-economic policies through its array of specialised offices which co-ordinated, under a senior party apparatchik, the work of ministerial officials and interest group leaders in a particular functional domain. These policies were then approved or altered in meetings of the party representative bodies—congresses or the central committee (Perthes 1995:156–7; Seale 1988:174).

Before Asad's take-over, party congresses were the centre of political life: they laid down ideological doctrine and long-range programs, decided between or reconciled competing factions and policy lines (notably the 1963 Sixth and the 1965 Eighth National Congresses) or legitimised changes of course resulting from major regime splits. Even after 1970, such party forums, in bringing together party apparatchiki, senior army commanders, ministers, governors and interest group leaders, were the political elite assembled and hence served as arenas in which executive initiatives were reconciled with wider bureaucratic interests and intra-elite conflicts settled (Sadowski 1985:3–8).

Under Asad, such conflicts ceased to reflect open ideological struggle between "moderate" and "radical" factions, but congress resolutions did tend to have a statist policy bias potentially at odds with the periodic Presidential sanctioned moves toward liberalisation promoted by liberal technocrats sympathetic to the market. Thus, the resolutions of the 1975 Sixth Regional Congress, the 1980 Seventh Regional Congress and the 1985 Eighth Regional Congress all approved various new state interventions in the market, arguably expressive of a certain institutionalisation of party ideology and not fully congruent with the government's post-1970 economic liberalisation.

These congresses were also occasions of vociferous criticism by delegates of members of the party and government leadership over corruption and incompetence, some of whom were then removed in subsequent elections to the Regional Command (Devlin 1983:58–59; Sadowski 1985). Whether this reflected the party "bases" holding leaders accountable, feuding elite factions using the peccadilloes of their rivals to bring them down, or Asad's use of such arenas to put some limits on corrupt practices, party congresses arguably functioned as a limited accountability mechanism. However, the failure to hold a party congress since 1985 has deadened even this measure of party democracy. Asad increasingly substituted for party assemblies the far weaker "National Progressive Front,"(in which Ba'th leaders sat with the representatives of smaller "progressive parties") as the body for legitimising his decisions.

2. The Council of Ministers: The ministerial bureaucracy, topped by the Council of Ministers (the cabinet or government) and headed by the Prime Minister, is a second more junior power institution. The cabinet is appointed by the President, theoretically on the recommendation of the Regional Command whose rival members jockey to insert their clients in the government. The cabinet makes the day-to-day decisions needed to implement the high policy defined by the President and the party and supervises the bureaucracy in policy-implementation. Prime Ministers are always senior Ba'thists and members of the Regional Command and Ba'thists control about half the ministries, including the strategic ones, while the rest are headed by independent technocrats and a handful of Nasserites, Communists, and Arab Socialists.

Prime ministers have primary responsibility for managing the state and the economy. This requires, in addition to administrative competence, the ability to contain the demands of patronage in the interest of economic rationality. This takes a strong prime minister who has to fight to amass the necessary power and inevitably makes enemies in the power elite. Asad's first Prime Minister, General Abd al-

Rahman al-Khulayfawi, had the stature to lead in his own right but precisely for that reason antagonised many interests over time. Abd al-Ra'uf al-Kasm had both exceptionally long tenure (1980–1987) and an exceptional background for a Ba'thi premier: a wealthy member of the Damascene bourgeoisie, he lacked strong party backing but, enjoying the President's support, he pursued his own statist agenda and clashed with several senior officers over jurisdictions and corruption. His conflict with Defence Minister Tlas over his effort to curb smuggling from Lebanon helped finally bring him down (Perthes 1995:152–53). More typical was his successor, Mahmoud al-Zoubi, a veteran Sunni Ba'thist from Dera who climbed to power through the state and party agricultural bureaucracies. He had no personal project and sought to govern through alliances with security barons like Ali Duba and politicians like Izz ad-Din Nasser. He was, thus, reputedly less effective at constraining the interference and influence peddling of politicos at the cost of managerial effectiveness.

Within the cabinet, the most powerful ministers are so by virtue of their party stature or closeness to the president, and these have often been beyond the prime minister's control; as such, the cabinet often fails to act as a team in the pursuit of an agreed program. Cabinet tenure is, except for a few regime stalwarts who remain in office through cabinet reshuffles, too short to permit most ministers to build power bases. These factors have limited both the intra-regime political weight and the policy-implementing effectiveness of the cabinet.

But individual ministers still count. Technocrat-ministers often hold positions in key ministries where competence is crucial to the regime's political or economic standing, such as the Ministries of Electricity and of Petroleum. They influence policy-making within their own domains and exercise the practical control over policy that accrues to those charged with its day-to-day implementation, although they often wield too little power to do their jobs effectively. The exception to this was the non-Ba'thist Minister of Economy, Muhammed al-Imadi, who was the main architect of Syria's economic liberalisation. Although he was seen by much of the business class as lacking the power to effectively implement it against political interference, few ministers have left a comparable mark on public policy.

IV.
PILLARS OF POWER

Asad and his associates controlled society from the levers of three instruments of power—a mass incorporating party apparatus, a

massive state bureaucracy and a large, well-equipped military and security force.

A.
The Ba'th Party apparatus

The party hierarchy in the 1980s rested on a base of 11,163 cells *(halaqat)* grouped in 1,395 "basic units" *(firqa, firaq)* located in villages, factories, neighbourhoods and public institutions; these formed 154 sub-branches or sections *(shu'ba, shu'ab)* at the district *(mantiqa)* or town level; and these constituted 18 branches *(far', furu')* in the provinces *(muhafazat),* big cities, and major institutions (such as a university). A parallel structure existed inside the army. From this base was elected a Regional Congress of 771 delegates, a Central Committee of 90, a Regional Command of 21 members and a National Command of twenty. Each level of organisation had its own assembly and executive committee—"command" or "leadership" *(qiyada)*—headed by an *amin* or secretary (See figure 4.1 page 76).

The party had a dual function. It was initially supposed to be an ideologically disciplined body of militants carrying out revolution in society; while it quickly lost its ideological energy, the party apparatus remains a hierarchy of political control running from the Regional Command to provincial and local party committees. In the provinces, the party branch command is the primary centre of regional authority, with the branch secretary outranking the provincial governor; because the secretary is a local politician and the governor a centrally appointed bureaucrat and normally an outsider they, in principle, check each other. The party chain of command, running parallel to the state bureaucracy and the "popular organisations," was also responsible for ensuring implementation of the party's policies in particular sectors through provincial offshoots of the Regional Command's central functional offices—such as those for peasants, education, workers, etc. (Hinnebusch 1990:166–190).

On the other hand, the party apparatus was supposed to be a mechanism which, through functions such as political recruitment and interest articulation, incorporated and empowered the regime's consistency. The party's mission, to recruit a mass base from the plebeian strata which in principle had a stake in the revolution, was indeed realised. At the village and district level, the party and its auxiliaries, notably the peasant union, are typically made up of educated youth, such as the local school teacher, and middle peasants in the cooperatives; as such, it is no alien force imposed from the outside. Moreover, the party constituted a ladder of upward political mobility from this local base. Thus, my 1974 study of the careers of 22

TABLE 4.1 OCCUPATIONAL COMPOSITION OF BA'TH PARTY MEMBERSHIP, 1980 AND 1984

	1980		1984	
Occupation	Number	%	Number	%
Doctors, Pharmacists	298	0.08	1,255	0.23
Engineers	1,104	0.30	3,739	0.69
Lawyers & Judges	401	0.11	688	0.13
Nurses	752	0.20	1,853	0.35
Teachers	19,668	5.27	40,598	7.55
Public Officials	31,390	8.41	48,103	8.94
Workers	51,224	13.70	73,965	13.75
Artisans	3,547	0.95	4,220	0.78
Peasants	65,859	17.63	74,665	13.88
Students	183,355	49.10	267,255	49.70
Other	15,879	4.25	21,523	4.00
Totals	373,477	100.00	537, 864	100.00

Source: ABSP 1985b: 47.

politicians who held power in the mid-seventies at the province and national levels found they were overwhelmingly drawn from small or middle peasant families, had managed to attend high school in the 1950s where they were attracted to the Ba'th and thereafter became professionals or white collar employees, while working their way up the party hierarchy from the village *firqa* (Hinnebusch 1990:170).

By the eighties, as Table 4.1 indicates, the party had incorporated some 500,000 members, overwhelmingly teachers, students, state employees, peasants and workers (ABSP 1985b: 35–58). The Ba'th indisputably incorporated a middle-lower class populist alliance, with more than 60% from the lower (worker and peasant) classes and only 2% from upper middle strata. (This is calculated from Table 4.1 by excluding students; ranking doctors, engineers, pharmacists, judges and lawyers as upper middle class; and nurses, teachers and public employees as middle class). This composition was associated with distinctive populist attitudes and political orientations which varied according to members' social background much as would be expected, with the more educated being more ideological and feeling more politically efficacious while the small employers and rich peasants preferred more freedom for the private sector than propertyless workers (Hinnebusch 1980).

In principle, the party also provided mechanisms for the articulation and aggregation of the interests of its constituency. Its rules provided for four year cycles of elections from the base level upward in which local partisans passed resolutions and elected delegates to higher level assemblies, culminating in the national-level policy-making

Regional Congress. A patron at the top was essential to move up very far in the party hierarchy, but ambitious local politicians had to cultivate constituents to win the local level election needed to catch the attention of higher ups; as such, delegates to party congresses sometimes arrived armed with resolutions reflecting the wishes of their constituents and the leadership reports which formed the basis of congress debates sometimes incorporated such input. Beginning in the seventies and especially in the eighties, however, elections ceased to turn on issues, official candidates were nominated from above, and alternative candidates ceased to be tolerated. More than ever, the leadership exercised its power to set the agenda, purge dissidents, and neutralise activists' use of elections and congresses to challenge incumbent office holders (Devlin 1983:33–34; Hinnebusch 1980; Perthes 1995:158–60). As the party declined as an arena of political activism and its ranks were flooded with compliant careerists attracted by the benefits of a ruling party, it was increasingly transformed into a patronage machine subordinate to the top rulers. Since the mid-eighties, even the cycle of periodic party elections has been on hold.

The party retains, however, some residual relevance as a link between the regime and its constituency. First, it still functions as a locus of individual "interest articulation," intervening with the bureaucracy to redress constituent grievances, place clients in jobs, and generally to lubricate the creaky workings of the bureaucratic state. While this is most salient at the rural level, even in the city the party was the centre of redress: thus in the 1990s, the Damascus party boss Ala ad-Din Abdin, *(amin al-fara dimeshq)* had good relations with Damascene bourgeois families and took care to service their grievances. Second, the party's continued recruitment of plebeian elements into the elite and the need of the elite to sustain this base of support tended to constrain departures from the statist and populist policies which apparently favoured the party's constituency. To this extent, the party could be said to institutionalise the regime's ideology.

B.
Populist corporatism

The party apparatus also controlled an array of corporatist associations through which differentiated societal sectors were brought under regime tutelage. Ba'thists literally created several "popular organisations" *(munazzamat sha'biya)* which incorporated peasants, youth, and women. The trade unions and the teachers' and agronomists' unions were traditionally Ba'th-dominated. The

professional associations *(niqabat mihaniya)* of doctors, lawyers, and engineers in which the Ba'th was lightly represented retained a certain independence until the Islamic rebellion (1978–82), during which their leaders were replaced by state appointees (Perthes 1995: 170–80).

Ba'th corporatism was chiefly an instrument of control. The popular organisations were (except for the trade unions) constructed from the top down rather than through struggle from below and hence lacked the autonomy and popular support to challenge the government. Yet, Ba'thist corporatism, at least initially, had a special "populist" character: while most corporatist regimes play off competing social forces or favour privileged groups such as businessmen's associations, the Ba'th, seeking to mobilize a popular base against the old classes it overthrew, organised previously excluded popular sectors and accorded them privileged access to power denied its bourgeois rivals. Ba'th corporatism thus began as a strategy of popular inclusion rather than exclusion or demobilisation: groups which hitherto lacked organisation acquired new, if still limited, political weight. Thus, the Ba'th-created Women's Union mobilised some real activism on behalf of equal employment opportunities and child care facilities for career women (Shaaban 1988:28–79). The trade unions wielded considerable weight as a sort of "chamber" of the public sector overshadowing the private sector chambers of commerce and industry (Perthes 1995:173–80). While previous regimes discouraged peasant organisation, the Ba'th recruited leaders from the small peasantry and backed their creation of union branches in the villages. The peasant union became a player in bureaucratic politics, pushing with some success for higher prices for state-marketed crops in conflict with agencies representing urban (Ministry of Supply) or industrial (Ministry of Industry) consumers of agricultural goods. It helped energise the land reform process and organised small peasants to counter the power of larger proprietors, investors, and middlemen, especially in pushing for the implementation of the agrarian relations laws protecting tenants, which would otherwise have remained paper decrees; today it is seen as a major obstacle by investors seeking a more favourable law. The union's access to decision-makers in the long absence of comparable access for landlords and merchants enhanced the weight of peasant against moneyed interests which would, in the normal course of things, have been more potent (Hinnebusch 1990:197–219; Springborg 1981).

In summary, the party and its auxiliaries provides the regime with strong points in the cities, a channel of patronage and access linking the centre and the rural provinces where its power base has always been strongest, and a network of control in the vast bureaucracy and

public sector. Through its auxiliaries the party has an organised presence in every social force. It is a tissue of ideological and material interests cutting across the many sectarian and class cleavages which divide Syrians. And, it is crucial to the regime's ability to sustain some support in the Sunni lower and middle classes while limiting opposition access to them.

C.
The state bureaucracy

The bureaucracy was not a major channel of elite recruitment comparable to the army and party and it was subject to control by the party apparatus and vulnerable to military interference. However, the dramatic expansion in the functions and size of the bureaucracy under the Ba'th made it a crucial third pillar of control in two respects.

First, as the scope and penetration of state functions expanded, more and more sectors of life, previously outside the purview of the state, came under the influence or control of the bureaucracy. Government and the public sector dominated industry and finance and although the traditional *suq* resisted their sway with tenacity, state penetration of the rural areas changed the fabric of social life there.

Secondly, the bureaucracy in the eighties employed one in five Syrians, partly as a consequence of a deliberate policy of absorbing unemployment—and hence political discontent—among the educated. While the party opened the door of education and of the state machine to rurals on a major scale, urban Syria continues to produce better educated graduates at a more rapid rate; thus, the upper levels of the bureaucracy have become, in a very real sense, an instrument of regime co-optation of the educated urban, largely Sunni, middle class, analogous to the role of army and party for the rural areas. Most public officials are incorporated into Ba'th-dominated professional or trade unions and many are party members. Many senior officials, even when not well-connected Ba'thists, have access to patrons higher up and thus enjoy privilege and access denied others. In return for loyalty, the regime tolerates the petty—and not so petty—corruption and poor job performance for which many officials are known. Yet, if little is expected of the bureaucrats, little is also given to them, at least at the lower levels. As, in the late seventies, their relatively fixed salaries fell behind the inflation unleashed by economic liberalisation and the oil boom, many officials saw the amenities they believed themselves entitled to, notably housing, slip out of reach. Because their aspirations outran incomes and opportunities, many were subject to acute frustration. Many

scrambled to go into business on the side, moonlight, and otherwise diversify their resources. Their subordination to less cultured, frequently Alawi rural politicians and army officers, and the favouritism shown Alawis in personnel matters, fuelled resentment among them. Yet, for the most part, bureaucrats refrained from directly challenging the regime, remaining a pliant administrative tool (Hinnebusch 1990: 190–196: Hinnebusch 1989; Perthes 1995: 141–5).

D.
The army and security forces

Finally, if other instruments of control fail, the regime can fall back on an enormous repressive apparatus. The security forces and intelligence services *(mukhabarat)* are multiple, pervasive in surveillance of society, and feared for the arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and torture of dissidents which they have practised. "To be sure," Devlin observes, "a certain amount of grumbling is tolerated as long as the grumblers don't organise." But the little tolerance of open dissent by the security forces deadens political life. The often corrupt behaviour of security barons is a major source of public dissatisfaction which, as Devlin points out, the regime is hard put to remedy: "An authoritarian regime that wants to stay in power is constrained in attempts to deal with dissatisfaction by the requirement that it not do injury to those props that are essential to its survival" (Devlin 1983:63–68).

The army, by virtue of its massive size and firepower makes rebellion very futile if not costly, so long as it remains loyal. In fact, since 1963, the Ba'thized army has repressed no less than seven (1963, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1973, 1980, 1982) major anti-regime urban disturbances, an accumulating record that must be a serious deterrent to violent opposition. But, given the role of armies as the Middle East's main vehicles of regime change, the Syrian army's reliability could never be take for granted and the regime pursued several overlapping strategies to control it.

First, the Ba'thization of the army was accompanied by the creation of a party organisation in it to organise and direct Ba'thi partisans. Asad's appointment of trusted Alawi kinsmen and clients to key "coup-making units" and the appointment of Alawi deputies to Sunni commanders in other units gave the regime a parallel sectarian network of control. The preference given Ba'this and Alawis in admission to the military academy meant that elements of the same social background and political convictions came to command both state and army. At the same time, the relative professionalization of

the officer corps pursued after the 1967 war was associated, except for regime defence units, with de-politicisation. Military expansion kept professional officers happy with promotions and equipment, officers generally became a privileged regime constituency, and their stake in protecting the army's professional integrity against political purges deterred them from political involvement. The difficulty of mounting a successful coup in an ever larger army also worked to preserve the reliability of the armed forces chain of command (Maoz 1975:285; Drysdale 1979; Picard 1988).

These control strategies were not, of course, foolproof. Thus, while ideological disputes declined as a major source of intra-military conflict after 1970, ideologically alienated Ba'thist officers were still a potential threat: disaffected Ba'thist officers mounted several abortive coup attempts in the mid-seventies protesting the intervention against the PLO in Lebanon. Then the Lebanese intervention, growing Alawi privilege, and the Islamic rebellion in the late seventies seriously exacerbated sectarian conflict in the army: there were instances of actual defection of Sunni officers to the Islamic opposition motivated by sectarian animosities, including the attempt on Asad's life by a member of the presidential guard and the 1979 massacre of scores of Alawi cadets by a Sunni officer. Moreover, in at least two instances, military discipline collapsed when units ordered into action against Sunni cities split along sectarian lines. During Islamic-inspired disturbances in Hama, the nearby 40th Brigade, heavily Hamawi in composition, was ordered into action against the city; when the Sunni commander contested the order, he was arrested by his Alawi deputy. Although its insubordination was contained, the unit nevertheless split and had this happened on a wider scale it could have posed a major danger to the regime. But it is a measure of the army's substantial political discipline that it could nevertheless be effectively used in an overtly sectarian conflict in Lebanon and against Syrian cities.

The army's domestic role was not, however, exclusively as an instrument of repression; it was also a channel by which the state incorporated society. In many villages, the military was a preferred prestige career, officers preferred marriage partners and local officers viewed as brokers with the state bureaucracy. Not only does the large officer corps link thousands through military discipline and careers to the regime, but tens of thousands of conscript youth and a half-million periodically mobilised reservists are incorporated into a "citizen army" for defence of the country against a bitter enemy.

V.
WIDENING THE STATE BASE: RENTIERISM AND IDENTITY

The Asad regime widened and consolidated its social base through exploitation of two resources, economic rent and political identity. First, the state control of the heights of the economy (the public sector, growing domestic oil production) and the receipt, after 1973, of large quantities of Arab aid gave the regime significant financial resources. This made it a source of patronage for core constituencies and enabled it to sustain distribution functions embodying a certain tacit social contract: political acquiescence was bought through state delivery of a minimum level of economic opportunity and welfare. These resources also financed a density of state building which would simply not otherwise have been possible (Leca 1988).

The transformation of the state into a font of patronage transformed the character of politics. The class conflict of the fifties and sixties gave way to competition by individuals and small groups for access to state patronage—whether jobs, contracts, or other privileges. This form of social competition put a premium on the personal connections which gave access to the clientele networks reaching down through the state. The manipulation of regional and sectarian ties inevitably became the route of least resistance to such access (Perthes 1995:180–181, 185–6).

At the same time, the regime attempted to manipulate and attach the two strongest levels of identity in Syria, the Pan-state and sub-state levels, to the state itself. On the one hand, Arabism remained the main identity by which the state claimed legitimacy and secular Arab nationalism remained the official ideology under which all communal groups enjoyed equal rights and were assimilated through state schools indoctrinating them in Arab nationalism. The regime sought to legitimise Syria's separate statehood by its mission as the champion of the Arab cause against Israel, the one element of the regime's policy on which a broad consensus existed, and its credible performance against Israel, at least by comparison to other Arab states, was perhaps its major source of legitimacy. On the other hand, the cohesion of the regime centre was based to a considerable degree on sub-state Alawi solidarity. Despite the potential contradictions between the logics of these two levels of identity, it was, given the power of sub- and transstate loyalties in Syria, perhaps inevitable, as well as ironic that these should be harnessed to state building ends.

VI.
CONCLUSION

In summary, Asad built authority through a complex mix of techniques and strategies. "Traditional" techniques with long roots in the political culture, notably the primordial political cement of kin and sectarian *asabiya,* were used to forge a reliable elite core dominating the state. "Modern" political technology—party ideology, organisation, bureaucratic control, and modern means of coercion and surveillance—consolidated control over society. The special features of the regime were, perhaps, its distinctive combination of sect and party to control the military and mobilize a rural base. The incorporation of a significant array of interests—the army and the minorities as well as sections of key social forces, including the bourgeoisie, the salaried middle class, the peasantry and the working class, gave the regime a cross-class, urbanrural social base. Popular legitimacy rested on Arabism and a "populist" social contract. At the top, Asad achieved relative Bonapartist-like autonomy, balancing between competing groups and social forces. Bonapartism was a function of the favourable social terrain created by the levelling of rival sources of social power through revolution from above and of the new patronage deriving from the much increased post-1973 access to rent (Hinnebusch 1990; Perthes 1995:187–190).

Chapter 5
STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS UNDER ASAD

The Ba'th state never achieved the totalitarian penetration and control of society implicit in its Leninist model and its autonomy was being contested even as it was being asserted. First, the state began to generate a new dominant class bridging the state and private sectors with its own distinct interests. The corruption and inequality resulting from this process spawned a violent Islamic opposition among those damaged. Then, the emergence of a more complex civil society, combined with the post-bi-polar transformation of the international system, brought pressure on the state to liberalise state-society relations.

I.
A"NEW CLASS"

Asad's first priority, the struggle with Israel, dictated an ever expanding military build-up while sustaining the economic growth crucial to state consolidation at home. This strategy depended on resources extracted from the international and regional systems, namely cheap arms and technology from the USSR/Eastern Bloc and massive financial aid from the Arab oil states. But it also required some economic liberalisation at home to mobilize domestic, expatriate and Arab capital. As such Asad, subordinating socialist ideology to economic pragmatism, pursued a dual strategy of simultaneous public investment and economic liberalisation, aimed at preserving the ability of the regime to control the economy and satisfy its constituency, while still appeasing and encouraging investment by the Syrian bourgeoisie .

State dominance of the economy was nominally sustained since much external aid was funnelled through the state which used part of it to finance a public sector industrialisation drive in the 1970s. In some other mixed sectors, like internal trade and construction, state firms also expanded their domains. At the same time, liberalisation of trade opened Syria to Western imports, fuelling revival of the private

sector, and the proliferation of a comprador bourgeoisie. Much of the new private business took the form of speculation on real estate and foreign exchange, cornering import licenses for scarce commodities like autos, or import-export operations which widened consumption rather than production. But migration of workers to the Gulf relieved unemployment and generated remittances while expatriate capital began to flow into Syria to finance new commercial enterprises. All this amounted to several economic safety valves.

In addition, however, the state turned over implementation of much of its development program to foreign firms and local contractors, fuelling a growing linkage between the state and private capital. The expenditure of state revenues on contracts with private construction firms and other sub-contractors and public sector purchases from private suppliers fuelled private sector growth. Favoured businessmen made fortunes on construction contracts, sometimes as sub-contractors for foreign firms selling turnkey projects to the state. Although much foreign trade continued to be imported through the public sector, agents of foreign firms mediated most transactions, getting commissions and paying kickbacks to officials to win contracts.

At the same time, the political elite was being thoroughly embourgeoised. The channelling of massive external revenues through the state and to private business created growing opportunities for state elites' self-enrichment through corrupt manipulation of state-market interchanges. Besides outright embezzlement, webs of shared interests in commissions and kickbacks grew up between high officials, politicians, and business interests. Military officers obtained scarce licenses to buy subsidised building materials from the public sector and sold it at black market prices. Smuggling operations, fuelled by the virtual incorporation of eastern Lebanon under the control of the Syrian military, mushroomed and deals sprang up between officers and businessmen needing otherwise unobtainable foreign imports. Since so much business depended on government money, approvals or imports, businessmen needed patrons in the regime, fuelling the rise of rival mutual protection alliances between them and political patrons—typically Alawi officers. Notably, businessmen seeking illegal access to scarce foreign exchange or engaged in foreign exchange speculation had to pay for political protection. Officers seeking to enrich themselves, in turn, needed businessmen with experience and foreign connections (Picard 1988: 139–140).

Thus, as political and military elites used their power to enrich themselves while the private bourgeoisie sought opportunities to translate wealth into political influence, alliances formed and a

certain amalgamation between the state and private bourgeoisies began. The recruitment to top office of scions of Damascene bourgeois families gave some with wealth access to power. At the same time, the state bourgeoisie—elements of the political elite and to a lesser degree managers and bureaucrats at all levels—used wealth skimmed off the public sector to go into business "on the side"—a restaurant, an import business, a chicken farm, a construction firm—thus securing a foothold in the private sector. In addition, a new state-dependent but private bourgeoisie—contractors, agents for foreign firms—some of petit bourgeois origins, was literally being created out of connections to the state. Fragments of the established bourgeoisie also found opportunities to preserve or reproduce itself on similar connections. The various alliances—business, political, sometimes marriage—which developed between state elites and businessmen was generating a new bourgeoisie-in-formation, partly official, partly service and commercial, with a foot in both public and private sectors. It may well deserve critics' appellation of "parasitic" *(tufaili)* as it largely milked the public sector in pursuit of partly non-productive activities (Seale 1988:317–320, 455–60).

The core of this new class was a developing Alawi-Damascene connection, a kind of "military-mercantile complex" as Sadiq al-Azm put it (Seale 1988:456). Within the political elite, the Alawis, especially military and intelligence officers, and the Damascene politicians and bureaucrats with links to the commercial bourgeoisie were best situated to profit from the new opportunities. The enrichment of the Alawi elite turned one of the previously strongest forces for radical change in the regime into a group with privileges to defend. Through the Damascene connection a regime which began as a rebellion against the establishment was becoming a partner with families of old and new business wealth in the capital. The most striking manifestation of this alliance was Rifat al-Asad's championship of the Sunni bourgeoisie against etatist technocrats.

An interesting question is whether the formation of this "class" was intentional: Seale (1988:457) speculates that Asad deliberately sought to give his regime a class underpinning needed for stability and, arguably, the muting of the former sharp antagonism between the state and the private bourgeoisie which resulted gave the regime a more secure power base. But new and old elites had yet to be amalgamated into a single dominant class. Alawis had not yet produced a significant stratum of private businessmen and as long as much of the means of production remained state-owned, the state bourgeoisie lacked the secure control deriving from private ownership. Intermarriage between families of the old oligarchy and the Alawi political elite remained exceptional although the phenomenon was

more widespread among the Sunni *nouveau riche* who grew up in the shadow of the regime.

Nor was the apex of state power "recaptured" by a coherent bourgeoisie intent on capitalist development. Rather, the regime preserved its autonomy of the various sectors of society, including the bourgeoisie. The top elite—the President and his close associates—ceased to take sides with the "have-nots" in social conflicts, as the radicals had done. But in spite of economic liberalisation, the regime showed few signs of a Sadat-like renunciation of socialism and instead of overtly promoting the consolidation of a new capitalist class or the disciplining of labour in the interest of profits, it sought to stay above and balance the various social forces. Far from according the bourgeoisie privileged input into policy-making, it sharply controlled political access on its own terms for nearly all social forces, balancing populist demands channelled through the corporatist "popular organisations" against liberalising pressures from the private sector.

That the bourgeoisie had not recaptured the state does not mean its interests were neglected in decision-making: the absence of a dynamic public sector dictated concessions to those who controlled a good portion of the country's wealth and entrepreneurship while the informal personal connections that developed between individual businessmen and patrons in the state elite could often sway particular decisions, if not high policy. In times of vulnerability, such as during the Islamic uprisings, business won concessions from the regime. But, if it pushed too hard, the regime responded with populist rhetoric or anti-corruption campaigns targeting businessmen. Crucially, the oil "rent" at the disposal of the state enhanced its relative autonomy of all sectors of society and, in particular, reduced the need to trade concessions to the bourgeoisie in return for taxes and investment.

Nevertheless, by the late seventies, the state, instead of breaking down class barriers, had begun to reconstruct them. For, even as a new rich emerged, the inflation produced by the influx of oil money, and, when Arab aid dropped off, the state deficit financing which replaced it, eroded the relatively fixed incomes of salaried employees, workers and the small peasantry dependent on sale of the crop to the state at set prices. The embourgeoisment of the elite gave it a stake in the protection and expansion of the new inequalities which differentiated it from its populist constituency (Picard 1979a, 1979b).

This had political consequences. Increasingly, the regime's party and corporatist structures were used less to mobilise support than to contain the discontent of its mass base. Despite the modest political relaxation after 1970, the heavy hand of the security police remained in evidence, sharply constraining political freedoms and thereby

increasingly alienating important segments of the professional middle class. By the late seventies, the regime was suffering from a grave legitimacy crisis, not only in society as a whole but within its own constituency as well (Drysdale: 1982).

II.
FAILED ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

The very strategies by which the regime was consolidated proved to be two-edged swords which also threatened it. Even as the regime was establishing roots in a new dominant class, its link to its mass constituency was eroding, while those marginalized—largely from the Sunni urban classes—by the regime's mixture of statism, rural and sectarian favouritism, corruption and new inequalities, turned to political Islam as an alternative ideology contesting the very legitimacy of the Ba'thist state. Between 1977 and 1982, Islamic militants mounted a sustained and violent challenge—assassinations, sabotage, strikes, and localised mass rebellion. This was to be the major test of the regime's strength: in the end this would-be Islamic revolution failed but the regime only survived with great difficulty and through massive repression.

A.
The Islamic movement

The Islamic movement faithfully reflected the interests and values of the roughly half of society effectively excluded by the Ba'th state. Historically, the leadership of political Islam in Syria was provided by politicised *ulama* and the Muslim Brotherhood *(al-Ikhwan).* The ulama had long been engaged in a rearguard action against the secularisation of political life in Syria and they particularly resented the militantly secular and minority-dominated Ba'th. They mobilised under Shaikh Habannakah to protest alleged Ba'thist atheism in 1967 and again to force the inclusion of Islamic provisions in the 1973 constitution. Many, recruited from urban merchant families or combining their religious functions with petty trade, also pressed religion into the defence of private property: they denounced Ba'th socialism as Marxist and hence atheist (Batatu 1982:14). Islamic disturbances often started with anti-regime sermons in the mosques, then spilled over into protests in nearby streets, and the call to rise against the regime was, more than once, proclaimed from the minaret. Since they were not organised in a state controlled hierarchy comparable to al-Azhar, the ulama retained considerable autonomy of the regime, although their political capacity was also limited by the

absence of effective organisation comparable, for example, to that of the Iranian mullahs.

Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood leadership was transformed into the vanguard of anti-Ba'thist militancy. The early Syrian Ikhwan under the leadership of Mustafa Saba'i initially shared the combination of nationalism and populism typical of Syria's middle class movements, including the Ba'th: Saba'i was jailed by the French for anti-imperialist agitation, denounced the old feudal oligarchy and called for armed struggle to liberate Palestine (Abd-Allah 1983:116–118). However, once the Ba'th took power, the Ikhwan became its ideological antithesis, seeking to restore much of the pre-Ba'th order. Isam al-Attar, Saba'i's successor, disputed Ba'thist power, was exiled, abandoned Saba'i's populism, and let the movement stagnate. In the mid-sixties a charismatic militant, Marwan Hadid, arose in Hama on the fringe of the formal Ikhwan, leading several uprisings and launching a campaign of assassinations against the Ba'thist elite. From a cotton-growing family, he expressed the city's rage at Ba'thist rural reforms. But he neglected the organisation needed to really threaten the regime. In was not, therefore, until the late seventies that the Ikhwan had effectively regrouped behind a new collective leadership, largely from middle class, ulama-linked families. Adnan Saad ad-Din, a middle class educator, emerged as leader (supervisor) in 1975 and Sa'id Hawwa, a middle class shari'a graduate became "chief ideologue." Ali Sadr ad-Din al-Bayanuni, an Aleppine lawyer from an ulama' family, became deputy supervisor while Husni Abu, from an Aleppine business family and son-in-law of a prominent *alim,* headed the military branch (Abd Allah 1983:101–128; Mayer 1983; Dekmejian 1985:119–123).

If these leaders lacked the standing or unquestioned authority of a Hassan al-Banna or a Khomeini, they were nevertheless organisation men who replaced the movement's informal structure with offices, chains of command, representative bodies and fighting cells. A core of cadres was developed and a wider circle of supporters mobilizable in times of confrontation was fostered; thus in Aleppo, Ikhwan fighters grew from about 500–700 in 1975 to ten times that in 1978 and perhaps nation-wide to 30,000. The scale and durability of the rebellion they mounted in the early eighties indicated a substantial advance in organisational capabilities (Dekmejian 1985:118–119).

B.
An Islamic counter-ideology

By the 1980s, the Ikhwan's ideology, reflecting its utter disaffection from populist Ba'thism, was a relatively liberal but economically anti-

populist variant of Islam which expressed the anti-statist world view of the *suq,* Sunni resentment of minority domination of the state, and the need to appeal to Syria's relatively liberal educated classes.

The first task of Islamic revolution was, the Ikhwan declared, a jihad to rid Syria of the Ba'th's sectarian military dictatorship led by Alawi unbelievers. It would be replaced by an Islamic state in which *shura* would be institutionalised in a strong elected parliament and an independent judiciary of shari'a jurists would have the power to nullify anything contrary to Islamic law. Freedom of expression and party competition were guaranteed, except for parties against Islam or linked to foreign powers (such as communists). Since the majority of Syrians were Muslim, the state had to be Islamic, but the rights of religious minorities would be guarded. Nevertheless, an austere republic of virtue seemed indicated: Islamic law would rule every branch of social life, the vices which the Islamists believed infected society—gambling, extravagance, alcohol, prostitution, night-clubs—would be eradicated and the citizenry morally regenerated by a return to the way of the prophet. Certain more radical Islamic leaders went further, rejecting democracy and holding that men must be ruled by the command of God through a pious caliph (Abd Allah 1983:201–267).

If the Islamic state would be repressive of individual license, its economic order was based on a return to free enterprise. The Ba'th system was said to mix the worst of the West (rampant materialism) and of the East (an unproductive state sector which destroyed incentives and was corrupted to enrich a small political clique). Islamic manifestos demanded the bloated bureaucracy be cut and the state withdraw from the regulation of and competition with private commerce. Workers had to cease to malinger and to work for their wages. Land reform had only reduced agricultural output. An Islamic economy would legitimate free enterprise and the "natural incentives" of a fair profit, "as prescribed by the Quran" (Sa'id Hawwa interview, Die Welt, Dec 23, 1980). The only populist plank was the traditional provision that class gaps be narrowed through payment of *zakat* by the rich to support charitable endowments for the poor and by a state guarantee of basic needs for all citizens.

C.
Social roots of conflict

The mass appeal of political Islam was historically concentrated in the traditional urban quarters where the ulama, the mosque and the *suq* came together. In the elections of the 1940s and 1950s, the Ikhwan elected a handful of deputies from the popular quarters of Damascus

and reached a high of ten seats nation-wide in the 1961 elections. Its expansion was obstructed in the pre-Ba'th era by the clientele networks of the old notable parties, the greater appeal of the secular parties to the mobilising middle class and the powerful appeal of Nasserism to its own urban mass constituency. With the decline of the notable parties under Ba'th rule and of Nasserism after Nasser, however, the Ikhwan had outlasted its major rivals for the support of the urban masses (Batatu 1982:17–18; Hinnebusch 1982c: 153–54).

Under the Ba'th, the movement's core support in the traditional urban quarters was strengthened, for this part of society, from large notable to small trader, paid the heaviest costs of Ba'thist social reforms, especially the state take-over of foreign trade, restrictions on imports, and a growing state retail network which deprived merchants of business. In the late 1960s, the radical Ba'th government's war on black marketers in the *suq,* in which merchants were arrested and stocks confiscated, inflamed animosities. Rich notable families with clientele ties in the old quarters gravitated to the Islamic coalition, supplied money, and engaged in conspiracies: there is much to the claim that "behind the mask of religion stands the Khumasiya"—Syria's main private industrial combine nationalised by the Ba'th and a symbol of the power of capital. The professional middle class frequently joined this coalition: Islamic protests against socialism were invariably linked with merchant and professional strikes. Thus, Islam, interpreted to exclude socialism, became a natural vehicle of protest for the victims of Ba'thist statism.

After 1970, Asad attempted to conciliate Muslim and bourgeois opinion. He portrayed himself as a pious Muslim, cultivated the ulama, and launched an economic liberalisation which revitalised the private sector. But he could not readily overcome the image of the regime as illegitimate sectarian rule among parts of the Sunni city. Moreover, business had still to deal with inefficient and unsympathetic officials or pay off corrupt ones and remained insecure in the face of new state interventions in commerce.

By the time of the Islamic uprisings in the late seventies, the core of the Islamic movement continued to be drawn from its historic bases: youth from "traditional" artisan and petty merchant families frequently recruited in mosque study circles. However, as many such youth went to university, a growing proportion of Islamic activists came to be drawn from the university educated. And as the Ikhwan came to express opposition to Ba'th social reforms, sons of higher status families, often professionals who would once have joined the old liberal-nationalist notable parties, now joined the Islamic movement. All this meant a more educated and higher status pool of activists (Batatu 1982:20).

There was, however, a clear geographic differentiation in the receptivity of urban Syria to Islamic rebellion: while the northern cities, notably Hama and Aleppo, were hotbeds of unrest, Damascus remained quiescent. This was in good part due to state policies. Asad co-opted into the regime middle and even upper class Damascenes. Close to the centre of power, personal connection and corrupt influence, the Damascene bourgeoisie was enriched on the disproportionate share of public money expended in the capital. By contrast to Damascus, traditional Hama suffered under Ba'th rule. A historic centre of Islamic piety, it took particular offence at Ba'thi secularism. It resented the favour shown the surrounding villages it used to dominate. Small inner city textile industries suffered from the competition of large state factories around Hama which recruited from rurals (Lawson 1982:24–7). The great Hamawi families—the Keilanies, Barazis, Azms—found galling the presence of Ba'th provincial officials in the heart of their once exclusive preserve. Aleppo was a similar case. The main seat of Syria's agrarian bourgeoisie, it especially suffered from agrarian reform. A political centre the equal of Damascus in the pre-Ba'th era, it was hurt by the regime's centralisation of power.

In the late seventies, support for political Islam was broadening beyond its original core to the wider educated urban Sunni middle class. As politics degenerated into a competition for scholarships and jobs through government patronage which seemed to favour Alawis, resentment of this translated into sympathy for political Islam. Most damaging, perhaps, the regime, in alienating parts of its own actual or potential constituency, turned many to Islam as a vehicle of protest. Inflation hurt the state employed middle class while corruption, inequality and the enrichment of the power elite alienated many party members or sympathisers. The 1976 Lebanon intervention against Palestinians and Muslims in defence of Christian "rightists" damaged regime legitimacy among Arab nationalists and wider Sunni opinion. As the regime's nationalist-populist legitimacy declined, while authoritarian rule gave no legitimate outlet to dissent and no other secular ideology offered a credible alternative to the Ba'th, political Islam acquired the sympathy of wider sectors of the population than ever before (Seale 1988:320–321).

While the growing conflict between Ba'thism and political Islam appeared to pit Alawis against Sunnis, in fact, the Sunni population was split. The Sunni middle class did not go over to the Islamic opposition *en masse.* Upper-middle class professionals entered tactical alliances with the Ikhwan, but, generally liberal-minded, they were unreceptive to Islamic ideology. The university campuses were not swept by Islam and opposition to the regime there was as likely to

take a leftist form. There was some sympathy for the Ikhwan among teachers and government employees, but their dependence on state employment, the strength of the secular centre and left among them, and the anti-statist ideology of the Ikhwan, deterred active pro-Ikhwan opposition. Urban high school students played a role in Ikhwan street protests, but the Ba'th also had an organisation in the schools which mobilised counter-demonstrations.

The Sunni lower strata were also split. Only traditional labour was clearly in the Ikhwan camp, providing many of the foot soldiers of rebellion. While the Ikhwan once had a modest following in the trade unions, in the sixties leftist trade unionists had mobilised against Islamic opposition to socialism and there is no evidence Islamicists had made a comeback there. In other countries, recent migrants to the city, alone in this larger more impersonal environment, have been especially receptive to fundamentalist Islam. Yet many rural migrants in Syria already had relatives established in the city with connections in the Ba'th-run state; and, the Ikhwan, opposed to rural migration as a threat to its own urban constituency, neglected their recruitment (Abd Allah 1983:91–2). Nor did the Ikhwan much penetrate the countryside, except in a few larger villages near the cities. Rural recruitment was of low priority for it and village Ba'thists were obstacles to it. Similarly, the ulama's numbers and density were unevenly distributed: in 1970, of the 3,000 ulama, two-thirds were concentrated in urban areas while there were only a thousand for 6,000 villages. By contrast, the Ba'th had cells in most villages (Batatu 1982:14).

In summary, the confrontation of state and Islam was a hybrid of class, group, and urban-rural conflict: a mix of attempted revenge by old class enemies of the plebeian-dominated Ba'thist state, disaffection by newly marginalized groups, and a sectarian war stimulated by unequal access to the public font of rent and patronage. Ultimately, perhaps, the conflict was most powerfully rooted in the split between the city with its commercial spirit and the agrarian socialism of the village.

D.
Failed revolution and "Totalitarian" repression

The Islamic uprising began in the late seventies with an intensive campaign of sabotage and assassinations of Alawi elites. As the Islamic challenge mounted, an internal debate raged in the Ba'th between hard-liners headed by the President's brother, Rifat, and relative liberals such as Prime Minister Mahmoud al-Ayubi who wished to defuse opposition through limited political liberalisation

and anti-corruption reforms. Reflective of this struggle, until 1980 the regime mixed appeasement and repression. To shore up eroding support among the urban salaried middle class, it increased bureaucratic and military salaries and tightened anti-inflation price controls. It promised more freedoms to the small leftist and nationalist parties which made up the pro-regime National Progressive Front and opened negotiations with other such groups in opposition—such as the Riyad al-Turk-led communist faction and Jamal al-Atasi's Arab Socialist faction. It launched anti-corruption campaigns and promised restrictions on the use of state security courts. The 7th Regional Congress of the Ba'th Party met in an atmosphere of crisis in which delegates blamed corrupt incumbent leaders—always excepting Asad's inner circle—for damaging the party and replaced them with new men. A new government of middle class technocrats was appointed under a reputedly "clean" Damascene Sunni prime minister, Abd al-Rauf al-Kasm. Some of the regime's moderate critics hoped its vulnerability could be used to reform and liberalise it, but generally the strategy of concessions failed: radical leftist groups and the professional middle class calculated that the weakened regime could be brought down or transformed by rebellion and so formed tactical alliances with the Islamic opposition (Seale 1988:323–332).

In the spring of 1980 the Islamic opposition, buoyed by the Revolution in Iran and sensing the isolation of the regime, initiated a new phase of resistance. A campaign of attacks on government installations in Aleppo escalated into urban guerrilla warfare, while mass pro-Ikhwan demonstrations flooded the streets and whole quarters slipped out of government control. Similar disturbances spread to Hama, Homs, Idlib, Latakia, Deir ez-Zor, Maaret-en-Namen and Jisr esh-Shagour. In Aleppo, professional associations backed their demands for an end to arbitrary security practices and for political freedoms with strikes and were joined by merchants protesting price and supply controls. The ulama called for the release of political prisoners, an end to martial law and application of Islamic law. Former political leaders, who had been marginalized by Asad's consolidation of power, began to organise in the hope of offering an alternative should the regime collapse. Ba'th party founder Salah ad-Din Bitar, publishing a journal in Paris, became a rallying point for disaffected Ba'thists. Anti-regime leftists demanded political freedoms and an end to repression. The partial adhesion of leftist and liberal middle class elements to an Islamic-led opposition made the prospects of a generalised anti-government movement under an Islamic umbrella, as in Iran, more real than ever before.

The heightening threat to the regime began to shift the intra-regime balance toward the hard-liners who favoured repression over

concession. The leaders of the lawyers, engineers, and doctors syndicates were purged and imprisoned. In mid-April 1980, government security forces carried out a massive sweep of northern cities in an effort to smash the Ikhwan network. When the rebellion continued, the hard-liners argued that reactionaries had exploited limited liberalisation and urged a return to "revolutionary vigilance." The regime charged that the opposition was part of a "Camp David conspiracy" by the US, Israel and Egypt to break Syria's steadfastness against Arab capitulation. The party attempted a counter-mobilisation of the labour, peasant, and youth unions and recruited armed militia units to defend the revolution. Asad exhorted peasants not to forget the bad old days when they were treated as the property of the landlords and warned that reaction had deep roots which still threatened the peasants' stake in the revolution. The murder of a landowning family in Harem by armed peasants and an atmosphere of intimidation which kept landowners from their estates in other villages around Aleppo was a warning to the old families that, without the protection of the government they disliked, their property rights were unenforceable. Asad, supposedly bowing to peasant demands, decreed a third minor land reform. A decree raising wages and favouring workers against their employers sent a similar political message.

An assassination attempt on the President in June 1980 gave the hard-liners a free hand to hunt down the regime's adversaries: terrorism was met by state terrorism. Rifat threatened a blood bath in defence of the regime. Islamic prisoners were massacred at Tadmur prison. Membership in the Ikhwan—after a amnesty period—was made a capital offence. The regime sent assassination squads abroad, murdering Salah al-Din Bitar and the wife of former Ikhwan leader Isam al-Attar. Raids by security forces on Ikhwan hideouts in which weapons were seized and military field courts delivered summary executions, sometimes degenerated into indiscriminate killings; in their little care to distinguish the activist Ikhwan from their passive supporters, they demonstrated the murderous lengths to which the regime would go to preserve itself. An emboldened Rifat sent his militant "Daughters of the Revolution" into the streets of Damascus to tear veils from the faces of traditional women. Interminable violence without prospect of resolution enabled the regime to play on the fears of the middle class of a breakdown in public order (Seale 1988:326–32).

Both sides apparently wanted the show-down which came in Hama, the Ikhwan stronghold, in February, 1982. In reaction to regime security operations, militants assaulted government centres, executed officials, and declared the city liberated. Members of the old families,

such as the Barazis, were joined in opposition to the regime by followers of their old anti-feudalist enemy, Akram al-Hawrani, a symbol of the extent to which the old class struggle was being superseded by a sectarian one. Since government forces could not penetrate the narrow streets, they used helicopter gunships, bulldozers and artillery bombardment against the city, virtually razing whole quarters and killing many thousands. The Ikhwan's call for a nation-wide uprising failed. Hama was more than people bargained for: those who had joined the opposition less out of Islamic zeal than dislike of the regime, melted away. The Islamic movement was decimated. The episode seemed to support Machiavelli's view that repression, provided it was done thoroughly, could work (Mayer 1983: 608; Seale 1988:332–338).

What explains the ability of the regime to withstand the rebellion? On the one hand, the regime proved much stronger than its opponents anticipated. The security apparatus mounted a repressive campaign of unusual ruthlessness, led by Alawi troops with a stake in regime survival. It was backed by the party and army, the best organised institutions in society; they did not, with few exceptions, split or unravel along sectarian lines, even under the pressures of near sectarian civil war. This solidarity of regime institutions, in turn, is explained by both the Alawi network which controlled them and their roots in the village which used to be exploited by the same urban forces represented in the Muslim uprising. The regime's sect-party combination, penetrated the Sunni-dominated bureaucracy and villages, making them largely unavailable for anti-regime mobilisation. The outcome suggests that the salaried middle class/ peasant base the regime had incorporated remained, though eroded, significantly intact. The crisis also revealed both how far shared interests had solidified between the regime and a Damascus-centred segment of the bourgeoisie and the very limited extent of this development elsewhere. At one level, the regime survived because the Alawis were better organised, armed, and centrally positioned; at another, because the struggle pitted a state, with all its resources and many dependants against those who had been marginalized by this state.

Nevertheless, had the Islamic movement been able to mobilize the Sunni majority, thereby splitting state institutions, it would almost certainly have brought down "minority rule." But it suffered from flaws which prevented it from putting together the ingredients of such a mass revolution, notably an urban-rural coalition. The movement was too urban and regionally based. Its anti-populist version of Islamic ideology lacked sufficiently wide appeal. Its attack on the state threatened the large military and bureaucratic middle class while the

secular left, organised workers, and peasants were wary of any return of power to merchants and landlords. The minorities—a fourth of the population—feared an Islamic state. Finally, where political Islam has been most successful, it has fused religious zeal with nationalist revolt against a foreign or foreign-dependent regime but the Ba'th had enough of a nationalist character to deprive Syrian Islam of this weapon.

The failed Islamic revolution arrested the development of the Ba'th state. On the one hand, the limited liberalisation begun in 1970 was cut short while the rebellion strained relations with the bourgeoisie and forced the regime to fall back, temporarily at least, on its traditional mass constituency, checking trends which had seemed on the verge of closing the gap between the political elite and the emerging economically dominant class. On the other hand, the seeds of totalitarianism, always present in the Ba'th's peculiar version of military Leninism, were activated as the state responded to the Islamic uprising by ratcheting up the level of control and repression. A purge of mosques, religious associations and professional syndicates threatened to eliminate these as bases, not just of Islamic opposition, but of civil society. The surviving modicum of press freedom and party pluralism was deadened. Inside the ruling party, the remnants of democracy—debates and elections—ceased and had not been restored even at the end of the nineties. The sack of Hama would stand for some time as a reminder of the costs of opposition.

The regime's brief flirtation with "totalitarianism" could not, however, be sustained, for it lacked the organisational muscle to wholly subordinate civil society: it never "atomised" society, where family, religious and neighbourhood solidarities retained their integrity and where networks of talk and rumour, informal groups, and personal connections penetrated the state, cut across political cleavages, and often softened the harshness of the regime. While Syria's Ba'thist structures resembled Iraq's, the regime eschewed the systematic terror needed to pulverise society in a way comparable to Iraq. Equally important, lacking a dynamic public sector, the essential economic underpinning of totalitarianism, or sufficient oil revenues to substitute for it, the Ba'th regime had to seek a *modus vivendi* with the bourgeoisie which was incompatible with continued totalitarian repression.

III.
ADAPTING TO THE "NEW WORLD ORDER"

A.
International Transformation: the Narrowing of Regime Options

The Ba'th state survived the Islamic revolution with its structure and orientation intact. But by the late eighties it faced new challenges, both domestic and international. Most obvious were the dramatic transformations in its international environment which narrowed its options and contracted its resources. The decline of oil prices after 1986 constricted the flow of rent from Syria's Gulf state donors which, together with heavy military burdens, threw Syria's economy into crisis in the late eighties. The weakening and later collapse of the Soviet Union, in depriving Syria of aid on concessionary terms and East bloc markets and technology, seemed to require that it reintegrate into a world capitalist market dominated by ideologically hostile states. Soviet collapse ended Syria's ability to exploit bi-polarity, depriving it of Soviet protection and cheap weapons while ushering in unchecked American hegemony. This seemed make a militant policy toward Israel unacceptably risky and futile while a diplomatic resolution of the conflict had become almost wholly dependent on American diplomacy and willingness to acknowledge Syria's legitimate interests.

These global changes inevitably had grave domestic implications for a regime consolidated through the exploitation of external resources and threats. The Ba'th's legitimating Arab nationalist mission, turning on the conflict with Israel, looked obsolete while the realignment toward the US needed to get its help in a diplomatic settlement might well require some domestic liberalisation. The demonstration effect of communist collapse threatened an authoritarian state built on a socialist ideological party and a public sector. If, as some pundits insisted, the regime was largely a function of Cold War largesse, now withdrawing, its economic and fiscal base could crumble and indeed the economy entered the nineties sunk in stagnation. Short of collapse, the combination of the more complex society modernisation was creating with less regime resources arguably put the regime under pressure to concede some political liberalisation to substitute for its declining ability to deliver economic benefits and security. Yet, in fact, the regime successfully adapted, at least in the medium term, to its more demanding environment, proving again its tenacity and durability in the face of pressure.

B.
The survival of civil society

Three decades of "military Leninism," and particularly the repression of the Islamic rebellion, undoubtedly curbed the autonomy and viability of civil society. However, not only did it survive, but, by the nineties, the Ba'th actually faced an increasingly complex, potentially more mobilised society. First, its own development drive, in fostering a proliferation of social forces enjoying more diversified resources, was broadening the potential bases of civil society and arguably creating pent up pressures for greater political pluralism. The 1960s and 1970s were a period of substantial economic growth which accelerated social mobilisation, as measured by increased education, literacy, urbanisation and the non-agricultural proportion of the work force. Urbanisation, raising the percent of urban population from 37% in 1960 to 50.5% in 1990, eroded the primordial isolation of village and minority sect, incorporating them into a larger-scale society. Literacy doubled between 1960 and 1989 while the differentiated modern work force proliferated as labour in agricultural plummeted from 51% to 26% in the same thirty years. The proportion of the labour force with secondary or university education climbed from about 5% of the population in 1970 to about 28% in 1989. As professionals and skilled workers proliferated so did membership in "secondary associations," ostensible networks of civil society. Syria became a middle income country with a significant educated middle class (Hinnebusch 1993b: 252).

Widened economic development and social-mobilisation was not, in itself, enough to force political pluralization of the regime, for the threshold at which mobilised social forces can no longer be contained without pluralization varies greatly. Where, as in Syria, the government employs perhaps 40% of the work force, including a large part of the educated and even professional classes, they lack the independence to challenge the state which more dispersed control of property might provide (Hinnebusch 1993b). The professional syndicates which organised the middle class were not autonomous of government and the largest growth in numbers was in state-dependent professionals such as agronomists and engineers, while lawyers, often a force for checking state power, lagged.

Yet, as the government's ability to provide economic resources declined, especially as inflation threatened the purchasing power of those on fixed state salaries, associations sprang up to fill the gap. Officially approved housing and transport co-operatives, in which members pooled resources, grew. So did informal associations wholly outside of government control, such as those in which government-

employed professionals, to enhance their fixed incomes, pooled resources to import goods. And, the sheer increase in the numbers of educated professionals meant that, to contain the brain drain, to cope with the growing gap between the number of graduates and available state jobs, and to avoid the political threat of the educated unemployed, the state was under pressure to accommodate the expectations of the educated middle strata for greater economic and personal freedom (Hinnebusch 1993b: 251–52).

Secondly, the limited capacity of the regime to penetrate the more traditional sectors of urban society permitted an "alternative" civil society, relatively outside its control, to persist. Despite the regime's victory over Islamic militants, Islam as a natural counter-ideology obviously could not be eradicated and remained deeply rooted in the urban *suq* where a merchant ethos mixed with a pervasive religious sensibility nurtured by the ulama. Moreover, the *suq* constituted a semi-autonomous economic base for this civil society. Indeed, the artisan and merchant petite bourgeoisie, far from declining under the Ba'th, had actually increased: according to one calculation (Longuenesse 1979:4–5), the petite bourgeoisie doubled in size during the socialist decade of the sixties—from 110,900 to 216,090. The number of merchants grew substantially in the more liberal decades from 1971 to 1991. The labour force in trade grew about 7% per year and, despite the austerity of the eighties, had by 1989 increased its proportion of the labour force from 9% to almost 12%. In some respects, the petite bourgeoisie flourished in spite of the regime, but it also sometimes developed in symbiotic relations with public sector suppliers and buyers, thus manipulating the regime to its own benefit (SAR 1976:151–2: SAR 1991:76–77).

The capacity of small private enterprises to grow in the space left by gaps in state control is apparent from several case studies. For example, in certain rural areas, such as Yabroud, independent family-owned light industries developed from a pre-existing artisan tradition while a history of emigration fostered the import of technology and the accumulation of capital, closeness to Lebanon permitted smuggling to overcome raw material constraints, and product lines were chosen from those outside of state price controls (Escher, 1990). Another case is that of small textile manufacturers and artisans in Aleppo. Those who joined the officially-approved Syndicate of Artisans or the Chamber of Industries were entitled to buy inputs from state factories or import agencies, to participate in a social security fund, and obtain export licenses from the Ministry of Economy. Alternatively, such businesses could participate in the "parallel" free market controlled by large merchants; artisans were dependent on these merchants for marketing and might pay higher prices for their inputs but they

presumably preferred personal relations with a patron to dependence on state officials. In cases of conflict, they relied on traditional arbiters in preference to the state's Labour Tribunals (Cornand 1984). Despite the pervasiveness of government control, there was, thus, an alternative network wherein participants sacrificed certain benefits for greater freedom. The same was so at the village level as Metral (1984) has shown in the case of the Ghab reclamation project where peasants similarly diversified their dependence between the private and state sectors.

To be sure, such autonomy is not without limits or costs: the habit of hiding assets from potential nationalisation and the fear of competition from state industries deterred the natural expansion of many small industries into larger fully legitimate firms. However, by the late eighties, Syria's economic crisis started to force a retreat in the state's economic role which incrementally created more space for such enterprises. With public sector revenues and economic growth stagnant, the regime sought to enlist private investment to fill the gap and it had to be given, in return, some concessions, notably some curbing of state intervention. At the same time, as revenue constraints forced the regime to cut back patronage, jobs and welfare, many Syrians had to reduce their dependence on government and to diversify their survival strategies by entering petty business. Yet others had acquired economic independence of the state through capital accumulated by work in the Gulf, Africa or elsewhere and invested abroad. The large informal and black market sectors of the economy, where state control was blunted by the corruption of its own officials, even its top elites, demonstrated the limits of the regime's ability to control a private sector it could not dispense with.

By the nineties, the regime had managed to survive the economic crisis through a combination of private sector revival, austerity measures, and a successful diversification of rent (as, for example, Iranian aid supplemented reduced Gulf aid). Then, in the post-Gulf war nineties, it sought to adapt to the new world order by a major deepening of economic liberalisation. New laws designed to attract foreign and expatriate investment into all sectors of the economy heralded, in effect, the end of the public sector monopoly of major industry. The economic landscape was decisively changing for, by contrast to the expansionist seventies, when the private bourgeoisie flourished on state patronage and contracts, after the eighties the state had far less largesse to dispense and the bourgeoisie's mobilisation of its own capital would give it greater potential autonomy of the state. The combination of a retreating state and advancing society set the stage for political decompression.

C.
Political de-compression

How could Asad's regime hope to resist the tide of global democratisation that had swept away its supposedly stronger totalitarian prototypes, especially at a time when it faced a more complex society with fewer resources? Could the Ba'thist elite, products of an earlier illiberal age, adapt to the "new world order?" In fact, unlike the Soviet apparatchiki, the Syrian elite was not prepared to give up power without a fight. Ideological legitimacy was less central to the regime than its communist counterparts and the end of socialist ideology was never going to be fatal. Indeed, the Syrian state had acquired a class underpinning communist regimes lacked and the political elite, with a foot already in business, had no comparable need to transform the system to become a property owning bourgeoisie.

The regime's strategy of political adaptation, which might best be called "calculated political decompression," was a substitute for—not a step toward—more substantial political pluralization and was designed to strengthen, not transform the regime (Hinnebusch 1998b). The regime aimed to adapt its structures and practices to allow a greater opening to and appeasement of the stronger, more independent social forces, the bourgeoisie, the middle class and the Islamicists, without conceding real power (Kienle 1994a). At the same time, Asad actually used the new constraints and the diversification of the regime's base to secure greater autonomy from his own supporters which he needed to make continued policy adjustments amidst a rapidly changing international environment; specifically, more securely incorporating more elements of the bourgeoisie into his regime allowed him to balance it against the army, the Alawis and the Ba'thists, thus preempting any challenges from his core constituency to the deepening of economic liberalisation or to the peace process.

Asad explicitly described his strategy as pluralization. He argued that his 1970 rise to power had already initiated a Syrian perestroika —political relaxation, opening to the private sector—long before Gorbachev. Although he warned that "the phase through which [Syria] is passing is not suitable for implementing [competitive elections] (FBIS, Daily Report, Near East & South Asia, May 17, 1990, 27), he explicitly approved greater political "pluralism" *(ta'addudiya)* in which presumably the regime would take more account of the views and interests of the bourgeois elements in the more complex social coalition it was putting together. In practice, a substantial political decompression did take place by comparison to the draconian rule of the 1980s. The relaxation of state control was manifest in greater personal freedom to travel, get rich, and consume.

The press remained state run but ministers were increasingly criticised in it while press criticism of the "new class" was replaced by accolades to businessmen for their contributions to the economy. The security forces were reined in, religious schools and mosques recovered their autonomy, and political prisoners were released. But checks on state power remained rudimentary: the judiciary, press and professional syndicates enjoyed no independence comparable even to that in Egypt. Party pluralization hardly existed: a few tiny new middle class parties subservient to the regime were tolerated, but there were no liberal parties with the stature of the Egyptian Wafd waiting in the wings in case of further liberalisation. Indicative of the still narrow limits of regime tolerance were the arrests of Syria's human rights activists when they became outspokenly critical of the lack of democracy. At heart, Asad's strategy was corporatist, not pluralist and the main element of pluralization was that business interest groups acquired access to decision-makers alongside the "popular organisations" (Hinnebusch 1998b).

Fuller political liberalisation, much less democratisation, was not on the agenda. On the one hand, pressures for political liberalisation were readily contained. Although democratisation experiments in Eastern Europe, Algeria and Jordan initially stimulated some yearning for democracy among the educated classes, the disorder and Islamic fundamentalism it unleashed made its natural constituents—business-men and intellectuals—wary of it. The bourgeoisie seemed prepared to defer demands for more power in return for business freedom and security while the middle class and intelligentsia were fragmented and isolated from the masses. In any case, Ba'th corporatism, in incorporating the masses into regime institutions, obstructed the potential formation of a democratic coalition of the bourgeoisie and middle class with popular strata.

On the other hand, the regime was deterred from substantial political liberalisation by the risk it would unleash the pent up resentments of older elements of the bourgeoisie, who had never forgiven the Ba'th for its socialist reforms, or enable political Islam to play the sectarian card. Until the social cleavage between state and bourgeoisie was fully bridged, the Alawis would be threatened by any return of power to the Sunni-dominated business establishment. The regime, determined to prevent the Algerian and East European scenarios, evidently calculated it had enough legitimacy to widen its support coalition through a more liberalised corporatism, but not enough to go further. But these alterations in the regime were enough to incrementally shift the intra-regime balance of power and diversify its social base.

1. Cutting The Party Down To Size: The previously high profile of the Ba'th party continued to be downgraded. By the nineties, the Regional Command no longer served as the "politburo" which made policy under Asad's leadership and became merely one "centre of power." It could still obstruct change—such as further economic liberalisation proposals—as long as Asad remained uncommitted to it. Official rhetoric denied that the collapse of Soviet socialism was relevant to Syria since Ba'thism had never denied the legitimacy of private property, only extremes of inequality in its distribution; but the party was clearly on the ideological defensive and was ever less a threat to private business. Party elections and congresses remained in abeyance and Asad did not bother to seek even pro-forma approval for major policy turns such as the Gulf war and Madrid peace talks from the party's highest legitimating body (although the central committee was consulted). However, the party incorporated a partly-Sunni rural base Asad still needed—if only to balance the Alawi jama'a and the Sunni urban bourgeoisie. It still functioned as an etatist interest group and patronage machine accessible to the regime's initial constituency. And, its plebeian social composition and ideological traditions obstructed its transformation into a party of the bourgeoisie as happened to Egypt's official party under Sadat (Hinnebusch 1993c: 8–10).

2. Co-opting The Bourgeoisie: Even as the Ba'th party was downgraded, the political access of the bourgeoisie was upgraded. The regime's future depends on its ability to win bourgeois support and investment without allowing the bourgeoisie to threaten the power elite. On the one hand, Asad's co-optation of fractions of the bourgeoisie allowed him to divide it and to play it off against other classes. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie's business partnerships with regime elements and the rise of a new generation untouched by the class wars of the 1960s created the climate for a closer alliance between the regime and the bourgeoisie, although its terms remained contested. The bourgeoisie wanted stability, personal security, freedom, rule of law and more political access but the regime delivered on only some of these expectations.

First, the prime minister's Committee for the Rationalisation of Imports, Exports and Consumption in which the heads of the Chambers of Commerce and of Industry were included, gave crucial bourgeois access to economic decision-making (Heydemann 1992). This transformed Syria's populist corporatism into the more conventional version in which the state balances between popular and bourgeois interest groups. While business groups had to support the regime's economic strategy and while they have sought compromise rather than confrontation with statist interests in the regime, they

now enjoyed some redress against arbitrary interference in the private sector and were allowed to press their interests, notably to defend the new proprivate sector line against statists while pushing for its expansion and legal institutionalisation. Second, a wider array of social forces—members of old families, ambitious nouveau riche businessmen and neighbourhood notables—was co-opted into parliament. They are allowed a bit of patronage and scope to intervene on behalf of constituents with the bureaucracy; a parliamentary block of independent merchants and industrialists sometimes co-ordinated for common interests (Perthes 1992c).

But business did not organise to contest government policy. The bourgeoisie's heterogeneous origins—some fractions fostered by the regime, others once its victims—deterred consciousness of common interests and it was not strong enough to force greater liberalisation than the regime wanted. The favour or disfavour of the regime could make or break a business; for example, currency laws, which most businessmen cannot avoid circumventing and which are generally not enforced, can always be invoked to punish opponents. Some large merchants who tried to win political popularity through press advertisements were, in fact, broken in this way: the regime would tolerate no bourgeois pretensions to political independence.

While it is uncertain how far the bourgeoisie is really satisfied, its formerly intense opposition to the regime was neutralised as increasing parts of it acquired a stake in the status quo. The Damascene bourgeoisie had been co-oped since the seventies, but, significantly, the Aleppo bourgeoisie, which supported the Islamic rebellion out of resentment at its marginalization under Damascus-centred etatism, was successfully appeased by new business opportunities, such as the chance to cash in on export deals to pay off the Soviet debt in the late eighties. Expatriate capital is less easily satisfied and the regime's increasing desire to attract and keep such investment put expatriates in a stronger position: thus, Omran al-Adham, a Paris based expatriate, thinking the time was ripe, published an open letter to Asad urging him to "show confidence in the people" and give them "the opportunity to demonstrate their innovative power in every sphere," while warning that "economic and political freedom go together" *(The Middle East* May-June 1991, 33). This was, of course, ignored and business confidence and investment will remain limited until the regime decisively curbs arbitrary state power and, ultimately, shares real power with the bourgeoisie.

3. The Opposition: from Repression to Co-optation: By the nineties, the secular opposition, fragmented into a multitude of factions with out of date ideologies (Communism, Nasserism), alternating between collaboration and opposition, and cut off from the mass public, was

little threat to the regime. It was political Islam that represented the main alternative to the Ba'th. But it was also divided and quiescent after the repression of the early eighties. Syria's, large (25–30%) non-Sunni minority population and strong tradition of liberal Islam, were obstacles to the potential of a revived fundamentalist Islam to sweep mass opinion. The government could also play on fear of the Algerian scenario among the Sunni middle class, especially among women and wealthy Westernised strata (Hinnebusch 1993c: 10–11).

Nevertheless, stability and advances in political liberalisation depended on a historic compromise with political Islam and Asad attempted to appease it: by building mosques, patronising the ulama, and propagating Islam in the mass media. He tried to bring the Alawis into the Islamic mainstream. He also tried to foster a conservative (al-Azhar-like) Islamic establishment to channel Islamic currents and legitimate the regime. Headed by the Mufti Ahmad Kaftaru and the Minister of Waqfs, it included the government appointed preachers of the great mosques and several professors of sharia, including a popular television preacher; at the base of establishment Islam a network of so-called "Asad Koranic schools" was founded.

The regime also sought political détente with opposition Islamicists through a 1992 release of militants from prison, tolerance of Islamicist publications and the co-optation of formerly opposition militants into parliament. Islamic social organisations and movements were now tolerated as long as they refrained from political involvement. Signs of Islamic resurgence included new mosques and a turn among youth to Islam, with the daughters of Westernised mothers assuming Islamic dress. To the very considerable extent that the Islamic opposition had expressed the reaction of the *suq* and sections of the bourgeoisie to Ba'thist socialism, economic liberalisation probably advanced Islamicist détente with the regime (Hinnebusch 1993c: 11–12).

4. Maintaining A Contracted Populism: A main challenge facing the regime was to co-opt the bourgeoisie into its coalition without excessively damaging and alienating its original populist constituency. The regime contracted populism but made no systematic assault on populist rights. The austerity measures at the end of the eighties disproportionately hurt workers and government employees who were caught between inflation and salary freezes, forcing many to go into petty business to survive. The regime also cut subsidies although basic commodities continued to be sold below cost in poor neighbourhoods. However, the regime's populist constituency was neither fully demobilised or politically excluded in this process. The access points of popular organisations to decision-makers retained

some effectiveness, enabling the trade unions to defend the public sector and labour rights. Worker and peasant union deputies were outspoken against reductions in social spending and lowered taxes on high incomes proposed in the 1992–93 parliamentary budget. There were, however, limits beyond which criticism was not permitted and Asad's instinctive response to rising trade union criticism and suggestions the unions relax their ties to the Ba'th, was a warning that freedom had to be pursued in the "framework of responsibility," not "contradiction and fragmentation" (Lawson 1994b: 152–54). But unions retained some ability to defend their interests against further economic liberalisation precisely because the regime was still autonomous of the bourgeoisie and, its relations with it being less secure, could less easily afford to offend mass opinion than other Middle Eastern states such as Mubarak's Egypt.

Ba'thi populist corporatism obstructed political liberalisation for, to the extent significant elements of the mass public remained incorporated into the regime's base, they were unavailable to opposition movements, liberal or Islamic, for construction of a "democratic coalition" against the state. Moreover, while mass opposition could potentially be mobilised among those threatened or damaged by economic liberalisation, this required a populist ideology of protest which was lacking: Marxism was discredited while political Islam, which elsewhere in the Middle East performed this function, espoused a free market ideology in Syria.

IV.
REGIME VULNERABILITY: SUCCESSION WITHOUT INSTITUTIONALISATION

The same patrimonial techniques which stabilised the Syrian state in the short term were, ironically, obstacles to the political institutionalisation crucial to its longer term durability. At the end of the nineties, Syria's limited political liberalisation appeared to have exhausted itself without beginning to address the problem of democratisation. Ruling elites will share power if they calculate the cost of repression to be too high and if a pact with the opposition on the rules of democratisation will protect their interests. So far, the costs have been contained and the risks have appeared too high for the Syrian regime. Democratisation would require full political freedom for the two powerful social forces, the bourgeoisie and political Islam, which pose the greatest threat to it. The regime lacks the strong institutions through which they might be effectively incorporated: the party, by ideology and social composition, cannot be used to co-opt them while the parliament is too weak to accord them a

share of real power. Since, however, the regime cannot do without the private sector and cannot eradicate Islam, it has reached an impasse with society.

The main immediate threat to regime stability is a succession crisis. Rifat al-Asad's bid for power in 1984 seemed to show that, when the inevitable succession crisis comes, praetorianism, suppressed but apparently just below the surface, could break out again. Three decades of personalization at the top—at the expense of the party, the font of Ba'thist ideology and of parliament, embodiment of legitimate procedure—have so weakened the institutions essential to a smooth succession that a post-Ataturk like scenario—the ruling party providing a successor who initiates political liberalisation—seems unlikely.

As such, Asad seemingly seeks a dynastic solution for fear that otherwise a power struggle could shatter the regime along sectarian lines, Thus, by the end of the nineties, Bashar Asad, the president's son, was overtly being groomed as if to carry on an Asadian dynasty. Yet Syria is a republic, and Bashar has no party or military seniority or popular stature in his own right which would entitle him to the presidency. As such, his father must attempt to create an alternative power base for him by purging his potential rivals and giving him experience at the top. He has been appointed commander of the Presidential guard, has presided over an anti-corruption campaign and assumed authority over Syria's relations with Lebanon. He was depicted as a new broom, overtly appealing to the youth of Syria's educated middle class. However, while the Alawi barons may rally around him to preempt Rifat al-Asad's enduring ambitions, Bashar may end up a front man for a junta; this could be no more than a temporary solution.

The prospects for a peaceful succession without sectarian strife and Lebanonization have been advanced by the Sunni-Alawi alliances and the modus vivendi between state and bourgeoisie which incremental liberalisation has fostered. To the extent the regime elite constitutes, together with the private sector, a new class with a stake in the state, it could perhaps preserve stability in a succession crisis. But the sectarian cleavage and a lack of political confidence on the part of the bourgeoisie means that the regime-bourgeoisie alliance remains unconsolidated.

Nevertheless, a deepening of political liberalisation could actually widen the forces with a stake in the stability of the state and, indeed, succession may, itself, provide the conditions for such a deepening, namely competition between rival elites for the support of civil society. There are already signs of this: thus, the two main apparent rivals for succession, Bashar and Rifat al-Asad have both tried to

project a liberal image. The winner may need (like Egypt's Sadat) to strike alliances beyond the regime (Alawi-army-party) core, notably with the business class, and will wish to stimulate the economic growth needed to consolidate his position: this may well require concessions of further autonomy to the bourgeoisie and to civil society. Such a scenario could propel the regime either toward a limited political liberalisation for the bourgeoisie (as in post-Nasserist Egypt) or alternatively toward a broader more inclusive democratisation. But nobody can guess whether Syria's fragile institutional framework could accommodate such expanded participation without a descent into praetorianism.

Chapter 6
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DEVELOPMENT

This chapter examines the regime's policies, their explanations and their consequences by looking at rural reform, industrialisation, and economic liberalisation.

I.
RURAL REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE BA'TH

A.
Agrarian policy

The Ba'th's policy of rural development was driven by several conflicting imperatives. The party came to power committed to an agrarian reform which would create a "socialist" agricultural sector based on state-led development, state farms and peasant cooperatives. Its ability to deliver a more equitable and productive agrarian sector was a key to its legitimacy among its putative rural constituency. However, a major practical challenge was posed by land re-distribution to peasants which, in alienating landlords and investors who had hitherto been the source of production requisites and investment, left a gap which the state had to fill if production was to be sustained. When Asad came to power, however, he inherited an agrarian sector in stagnation: unfinished cooperatization meant the state was failing to fill the gap. He therefore sought to placate landlords and investors and revive the private agricultural sector. Not only were landlords encouraged to invest on their reduced post-land reform holdings, but the vast state lands in the scarcely populated Jazirah, on which the state lacked the resources to either resettle peasants or create state farms, were now rented out to agrarian entrepreneurs. Thus, the bourgeoisie, formerly regarded as a bankrupt hostile class, was being made a partner in agrarian development. The state, in the meantime, would concentrate on

organising the small peasant sector and reserve its investment for the newly reclaimed and irrigated lands in major hydraulic projects such as the Ghab and the Euphrates Basin. Agriculture would, thus, have dual private and "socialist" sectors (ABSP 1965; 1972b).

However, the exact boundaries between them became a matter of debate among policy makers in the seventies. Party apparatchiki and East bloc educated technocrats wanted to consolidate and expand the socialist (state-co-operative) sector at the expense of the market while Western educated technocrats resisted, advocating selective liberal isation. For several reasons, the statists recovered the initiative in the seventies. Consolidation of small holdings through cooperatization was essential to prevent their absorption by a resurgent bourgeoisie and a consequent loss of the regime's political base to a still powerful and rival social force. Public sector import substitute industrialisation required state control over agricultural raw materials such as cotton while the state's provision of basic foodstuffs to its urban constituency required state marketing of grains. Party officials, impressed by the supposed aim of Western states to use a "food weapon" to counter the Arab oil weapon, sought the control over planting decisions that would give food self-sufficiency.

In addition, party apparatchiki and ministerial bureaucrats were acquiring a stake in the expanding new agrarian bureaucracy. The institutionalisation of ideology in the party was unmistakable in the constancy with which it pushed socialist-like solutions in agriculture, particularly cooperatization, and in its abiding distrust for private sector "feudalists" and merchants. As recently as the 1985 Eighth Regional Congress, the Regional Command's Peasant Office pushed to have production co-operatives set up on newly irrigated land in the Euphrates valley, continued to promote the expansion of state marketing into new fields such as fruits and vegetables, and proposed fixing the prices of machine services and transport in agriculture instead of leaving them to the free market (Hinnebusch 1989:41–2; Munathama 1975; ABSP 1975:37–50).

The etatist drive generated resistance. Peasants sometimes evaded the state crop rotation plan. States farms were failing and could not be used to replace private investors on the dry lands in the Jezirah. In the Euphrates Basin, the state was pouring enormous investments into hydraulic projects where returns were slow and meagre. By the eighties, resource constraints were empowering liberals who wanted to subordinate ideology to economic practicality. They won a watershed victory when state-private joint ventures were approved in agriculture which, in effect, meant turning state lands over to investors on a permanent basis. Given the division among state elites, the agrarian bourgeoisie and the peasants could use the regime's need

for investment and cooperation to blunt further bureaucratic intervention made in the name of agrarian socialism (Hinnebusch 1989:42–48; Musallim 1983: 104–05).

No decisive choice between state and private strategies was ever made: rather, a mix of state, co-operative and private tenure forms crystallised. Agrarian policy expressed a pragmatic "muddling through," zigzagging under the competitive influence of statists and liberalizers, peasant and bourgeoisie. Yet, in defending a co-operative and state agricultural sector, the regime continued to block the bourgeoisie from reasserting control over the bulk of the agrarian surplus which in part is retained by the peasantry, in part extracted by the state itself.

B.
Bureaucracy and agrarian development

The agricultural development strategy of the regime was at heart bureaucratic. It would be supervised by technocrats and co-ordinated through planning from above; if there was a problem or a need, a new ministry or "general organisation" was created to deal with it.

State planning was to translate the party's goals into concrete policies and programs. The Higher Planning Council, an inter-ministerial body headed by the Prime Minister, was backed by technocrats in the State Planning Commission who drew up a state investment plan, identifying projects and allocating budgets. It attempted, often unsuccessfully, to co-ordinate the proposals of the various arms of the bureaucracy, each of which sought to expand its jurisdictions and programs. In practice, projects were sometimes added to the plan by a powerful minister or party politician without benefit of any feasibility study—especially in the mid-seventies when the rival arms of the state apparatus were scrambling to claim a chunk of the Arab oil wealth pouring in; for example, a paper pulp factory in Deir ez-Zor imposed by the Ministry of Industry against the opposition of the Planning Minister became an expensive white elephant. And the party apparatus promoted ideologically inspired but costly projects, such as the Euphrates Basin land reclamation project, showpiece of Ba'thist agrarian socialism (Hinnebusch 1989:48–60; Arudki 1972:171–78: Keilany 1970).

Although the investment plan was legally binding in theory, in practice, ministries regularly fell well short of their targets partly because of unrealistic goals, partly due to technical problems such as the gypsum encountered in the Euphrates basin; or owing to shortfalls in Arab financial assistance caused by political conflicts; or because of bureaucratic malco-ordination or contractor mismanagement. In the

absence of sufficient data and expert analysis, follow-up sessions of the Higher Planning Council typically failed to pinpoint responsibility for failures and degenerated into efforts by officials to defend their ministries (Hinnebusch 1989:53–56).

Planners also produced an agricultural production plan which set targets for key crops, crop rotations tailored to various regions, and the levels of inputs and credit needed to reach these targets. The plan was enforced through price policy (raising or lowering of state purchasing prices for crops), linkage of state credit to crop delivery and by licensing of farmers. To cultivators, the production plan was often an unwelcome constraint which put the "needs" of the country as projected by planners over their wishes and which they sometimes sought to evade (Hinnebusch 1989:51–3).

Responsibility for implementation of the production plan was fragmented. While the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR) was in charge of agricultural production, the Agricultural Bank, and crop export agencies such as the cotton marketing agency, were subordinated to the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade, while the Ministry of Internal Trade regulated market prices for agricultural goods and the Ministry of Industry controlled the food, textile, and sugar firms which bought and processed crops and the industries which produced farming inputs such as fertilisers.

Co-ordination was supposed to be achieved through the Higher Agricultural Council (HAC), a body chaired by the Prime Minister and including the heads of these agencies. Often however, "each ministry acts as if it were an independent interest in conflict with the others," frustrating co-ordination of the several functions which had to be done simultaneously "since delay in the performance of one leads to a chain of bottlenecks in the performance of others" (Hilan 1973:113).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, central to day to day implementation of agricultural policy among farmers, suffered from endemic weaknesses, beginning with leadership. Ministers were often either politicos lacking qualifications or had overly short tenures; as such, the Ministry was led by a handful of permanent deputy ministers having either political clout or agronomic expertise. The Ministry was run with far too little delegation of power, overburdening the minister and his deputies, to whom 29 department heads reported: decision-making was therefore sluggish and initiative by subordinates discouraged.

Mission performance was also enervated by corruption, a submerged struggle between rival clientalist coalitions of high officials and supplier agents over control of the contracts and the commissions at stake in it. When commissions dictated the choice of projects, cost-benefit rationality was sacrificed. Licenses to export livestock to the

lucrative markets in the Gulf or to import agricultural machinery and the right to rent extensive state lands at low prices were prized plums which agricultural authorities could distribute to clients.

Low salaries, especially in senior positions, encouraged corruption, a brain drain, and an obsession with bonuses and allowances which depended on individual connections. Inflation, in reducing the real salaries of senior ministry officials by 64% from 1974 to 1979 and further in the mid-eighties, was the major threat to the integrity of the public service. The irony is that the government's deficit financing contributed to the inflation which debilitated its own capabilities.

Reflective of its ambitious mission, the ministry had a complex division of labour. Its multiple departments included budgeting, accounting, contracts, personnel matters, planning & statistics, agricultural input delivery, plant protection, research, quality control, marketing, agricultural extension, agricultural secondary schools, animal husbandry, range management, and agricultural machinery. At the governorate *(muhafazut)* level, an agricultural director *(mudir zira'i)* on the staff of the governor co-ordinated field offices corresponding to certain of these central departments. His staff agronomists were supposed to be specialists consulted by agronomists working in the field; but there was too little communication between agronomists at various levels. Too many were mere "protectors of the rules" rather than expediters of task performance and technical experts devoted much of their time to enforcing regulations. There was insufficient housing and transport to keep local-level agronomists mobile and in the field. There was also a severe scarcity of technically competent personnel: the university agronomy faculty did not attract the very brightest students, faculties and facilities were inadequate, and training provided little practical experience; farmers often discovered they knew more than the recent agronomy graduates sent to instruct them (Hinnebusch 1989:76–86: Arudki 1972:234–36; Musallim 1983: 145–49). Thus, the efficiency of the state apparatus failed to keep pace with its functional and structural expansion. Remarkably, it nevertheless achieved, although at significant cost and after substantial delay, many of its major objectives.

C.
Agrarian policy in action

1. Land Reform: The centrepiece of the Ba'th's agrarian project was land reform which it took two decades to complete but otherwise carried out with reasonable success. First begun under the UAR, albeit under a Ba'thist Ministry of Land Reform and briefly reversed under the separatist regime, it was sharply accelerated under the

TABLE 3 PRE- AND POST-REFORM AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

	Pre-Reform		Post-Reform	
	% Owned	% Pop. land surface	% Owned	% Pop. land surface
Large (100+)	1.0	50.0	0.5	17.7
Medium (10–100)	9.0	37.0	15.3	58.7
Small (–10)	30.0	13.0	48.0	23.6
Landless	60.0	0.0	36.1	0.0

Sources: Hinnebusch 1989

radical Ba'th. Land re-distribution was largely finished by 1970 although cooperatization would not be fully completed until the end of the seventies. The reform radically transformed agrarian structure: it much reduced the great estates, checked the forced proletarianization of the peasantry which had threatened village life, and broadened and consolidated the small holding sector. The outcome was a mixed small peasant and medium capitalist agrarian structure.

Table 3 gives a very rough indication of the impact of the land reform on land distribution. But data taking account of differences between irrigated and non-irrigated holdings allows a more precise adumbration of agrarian stratification at the completion of the reform (Hinnebusch 1989:112–116).

1. At the top, were the big landlords and entrepreneur-renters, about 1 % of holders, who still controlled a fifth of the land. However, the land reform accelerated their transformation from pre-capitalist "feudalists" into agrarian capitalists. To maintain their incomes on reduced holdings, formerly absentee landlords started to invest in advanced technology, such as sprinkler irrigation, improved seeds and mechanised harvesters. Thus, the reform resulted in the replacement of large but extensively cultivated estates with smaller but more intensely cultivated capitalist farms.

2. Below the larger landlords was a thin stratum of "rich peasants" and, around the large cities, urban investors making up barely 3% of holders, which controlled more than 10% of the surface. They might be manager-cultivators hiring labour, or might rent or let their land out to a sharecropper. While big landlords, rich peasants, and urban investors together made up only about 4% of holders, they controlled almost a third of the land and 37% of all agricultural machinery in 1970.

3. Below them was a relatively secure, prosperous and entrepreneurial middle peasant stratum amounting to over a third of all owners and commanding a half of the land surface. These self-sufficient middle peasants (owning 2–10 hectares (ha.) irrigated or 10–

50 ha. dry land and not employing the labour of others except seasonally) could avoid off-farm work and had the resources for land improvement.

4. Next down, were small peasants, representing nearly 62% of owners but controlling only 18.2% of the agricultural surface. The better off upper half of this stratum (peasant owners of over 1 ha. irrigated, 3 ha. rainfed land), had a strong personal attachment to the land, some independence and lived a decent peasant life. They were, however, unlikely to be very prosperous, individually they lacked the resources to much increase production and, under-employed, they or their sons might leave the land at least temporarily to accumulate some petty capital. The poorer half of the small peasants (owners with less than 1 irrigated or 3 rainfed hectares) were compelled to seek supplementary off-farm income.

5. At the bottom of the stratification system were the "landless:" tenants, sharecroppers and wage workers. Most renters and sharecroppers received about half of the income that a landowning family would receive on an equivalent size farm, so the average tenant probably ranked with the poorest stratum of the peasantry. They also often lacked the resources and motivation to improve their holdings. Finally, the low income and insecurity of agricultural wage workers put them at the very bottom of the agrarian structure, earning a third to a half of the income of small holders in the seventies.

In eschewing a more thorough equalisation of land holdings and permitting the preservation of medium-sized estates, the regime failed to make enough land available to wipe out landlessness and consolidate a secure small peasantry. The stark fact was that, even after land reform, if landless agricultural workers, tenants, sharecroppers, and peasant holders with so little land that they could not support themselves on it without supplementary work are added together, these poor peasants made up about half of Syria's peasantry in 1970. Poverty remained a fact of life in the post-reform Syrian village (Hinnebusch 1989:116).

But agrarian reform did consolidate, between the richest and poorest peasants, a stratum made up of middle peasants and the viable half of the small holders, who together constituted about two-thirds of land holders and about two-fifths of the agrarian population. This stratum's control of around 60% of the land arguably made it the strongest social force in rural Syria, replacing the once dominant landed magnates. These, as well as poorer peasants were, moreover, incorporated into state supported co-operatives. By 1981, over two-thirds of the agriculturally-dependent rural population or between seventy and eighty percent of all eligible holders (those owning no more than 8 ha. irrigated and 30 ha. non-irrigated land, plus

sharecroppers and renters) and by 1983 about 85% of all peasant families (including wage labourers) were at least nominally in co-operatives (Hinnebusch 1989: 177). This was of no little consequence for the political economy of the regime: as against claims that the Ba'th merely represented the rich peasantry, this data suggests it consolidated a political base among Syria's substantial mainstream middle peasantry.

2. Co-operatives: It was the co-operatives and the agrarian bureaucracy linking them to the state which made land reform viable. Cooperatives provided the framework by which the state delivered production loans and agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilisers), services (mechanised plowing and harvesting, crop protection) and innovation to small holders, while also imposing the agricultural plan and the facilitating the compulsory sale of strategic crops to the state. This system gradually replaced the landlords and money lenders who had formerly lived off "empires" of peasant debtors or used foreclosure on debt to acquire ownership of small holdings. In delivering services and blocking such land reconcentration, the co-operatives stabilised the small holding sector. By facilitating state marketing of crops, they excluded landlords and merchants from mechanisms of surplus extraction and capital accumulation, but, by contrast to many other similar regimes, state marketing in Syria was not generally used by the regime to extract a surplus from peasants and indeed provided them with stable support prices.

While the co-operatives made the small sector reasonably productive, they failed to realise the ideals of socialist agriculture: to organise the collective investment and common production processes thought needed by the regime to overcome land fragmentation. Peasants lacked enough confidence in the co-operatives to cede individual management of their land, partly because family rivalries destroyed trust, partly because of the government's use of the co-operatives as instruments of control: for enforcing crop rotations and for imposing collective responsibility for credit repayment. As such, the co-operatives provided no "socialist" alternative to capitalist mechanisms of accumulation and investment. However, they did encourage entrepreneurship among middle peasants and were arguably generators of a petty peasant capitalism. They were, moreover, supplemented by an array of supportive bureaucratic organisations created to carry out specialised policy tasks, including the Ghab and Euphrates Basin administrations, the General Organisations for promoting production of cattle, poultry, and fish, and similar bureaucracies for the delivery of fodder and of seeds and for the spread of agricultural mechanisation. These organisations filled some of the gap left by the entrepreneurial inertia of many co-

operatives (Bakhour & Sabbagh 1979; Hinnebusch 1989:147–63, 171–206; Bianquis 1979; Juma 1972: Metral 1984).

3. Bureaucratic Performance, Socio-economic Outcomes: Aside from land reform, the performance of the state agricultural bureaucracy was mixed: it contributed to increased production and productivity but often at considerable cost in waste and inefficiency. The production plan reduced unnecessary fallow, stabilised wheat output by concentrating it in good rainfall areas and diversified the crop mix. The state's planning, credit, and input system advanced the regime's control over production of strategic crops, notably cotton, sugar beets and wheat, essential for export earnings, agro-industry and food security, while also guaranteeing producers stable, if not exactly lucrative markets. But state marketing agencies seemed incapable of effectively organising the delivery of fruits and vegetables to public processing factories. The Ministry of Agriculture initiated a score of useful innovations, from orchardization to seed and animal improvement, advancing agricultural intensification and mechanisation with considerable success, although the dismal performance of the research and extension apparatus prevented the derivation of maximum benefit from this effort (Hinnebusch 1989:123–170).

Major resources were invested in land reclamation and irrigation although this effort, as well, was plagued by considerable waste and inefficiency. The Ghab irrigation project, long "sick" from incompetent state management, finally transformed an area of desolation and urban dominance into a viable peasant community with a certain prosperity (Metral 1984). The much more ambitious Euphrates project was, in an arid country which has reached the limits of extensive expansion, a natural next step in agricultural development and could reproduce the Ghab outcome. But it has been a costly drain on the state's limited resources and a strain on its modest management capacities. The state's massive investment in irrigation and reclamation did not decisively relieve Syrian agriculture of its crippling dependence on unreliable rainfall, in large part because advances in irrigation were partly cancelled out by increased salinity owing to inadequate drainage. But it consolidated and gradually expanded the irrigated sector (Sainsaulieu 1986; Hinnebusch 1989: 207–252).

Land reform, cooperatization and state intervention in agriculture had several positive social and economic consequences. Land reform, in enhancing the independence and potential for initiative among middle and viable small holders while forcing greater investment by landlords on their reduced holdings, created an agrarian structure more conducive to sustained growth than the old one and at the cost

of only temporary declines in production during the implementation process. The cooperatives provided crucial support to land reform beneficiaries and peasants generally. The state's delivery of services, credit, and investments in irrigation and land reclamation probably put more resources into agriculture than it extracted. The public sector also developed sectoral interchanges which stimulated agriculture: industry provided inputs, markets and employment opportunities while the construction sector provided hydraulic public works and the transport infrastructure needed to integrate village and market. Overall, state activity stimulated enough development to permit peasants to diversify their resources and strategies: many, taking advantage of new opportunities for off-farm income and of state credit and inputs acquired the resources to significantly intensify production (Hinnebusch 1989:294–301; Bakhour 1984; Keilany 1980).

As a result, there was a continuous increase in agricultural production from the mid-seventies through the eighties. Growth in agricultural per capita output despite a decline in the agricultural work force indicated that agriculture was being brought to support a growing non-agricultural population. This growth was not, however, enough to overcome a chronic deficit in the agricultural balance of trade. And, for better or worse, state-dominated agriculture did not become an effective mechanism for extracting a surplus from agriculture to sustain industrialisation. Partly for this reason, growth in agriculture translated into a significant rise in the rural standard of living (Hinnebusch 1989:253–283; USDA 1980).

D.
State and village: the political consequences of agrarian reform

The Ba'th's drive to enhance state capabilities in agriculture generally succeeded. Land reform demolished traditional interests resistant to state penetration and cooperatization institutionalised state linkages to peasants. The effect of this state intervention in the village was to pluralize power there, breaking the former dominance of the landed oligarchy over the peasantry and bridging the urban-rural gap which long kept the village encapsulated and depressed. Of course, the regime's bureaucratic penetration and regulation of agriculture had costs for peasants. There were conflicts of interest between their desire for independence and the bureaucracy's drive for control.

Yet, peasants were not so powerless as before. The village had acquired access to national power it never previously enjoyed. Alliances between agriculture ministry bureaucrats and local party and peasant union leaders pushed for higher producer prices.

Clientalism supplemented this corporatist interest articulation when individuals who moved up in the national power structure used their position to help out kin in the village. The potential for official arbitrariness was diluted by the plurality of authorities—party, peasant union, and ministry officials - who took decisions in committees and by the recruitment of rurals into the local bureaucracy. Many peasants found ways to evade, even manipulate the state: a son would join the local party, a bribe would sway an official; patronage was "democratised" at the local level as public goods were diverted and laws bent to favour locals. Finally, officials could not afford to alienate peasants who could ultimately leave the state/co-operative sector and opt for private patrons and markets; indeed peasants utilised both state and private networks as it suited their interests (Metral 1984; Hinnebusch 1976; Seurat 1979).

II.
BA'THIST ETATISM AND IMPORT SUBSTITUTE INDUSTRIALISATION

A.
The leading public sector

The Ba'th development model enshrined the public sector as the "leading" sector which would dominate strategic industry, power, foreign trade and infrastructure. The state would lead the industrialisation of the country required to build an economic base of national power. In fact, by 1970, the public sector had become the core of the economy and the state development plan and investment budget were its main source of expansion: thus, gross fixed capital formation in the public sector grew from 170 million S.P. in 1963 to 1, 262 million in 1976, while in the private sector it grew from 355 million to only 655.2 million (World Bank, 1980, v. 4, p. 48). The state regularly accounted for more than 60% of gross fixed capital formation. In 1984, public industry employed a third of the labour force in industry but produced 78% of gross industrial output (SAR 1989:77, 170–71, 508).

A role was preserved for the private sector in trade, construction and light industry. In the 1970s, the public and private sectors each accounted for roughly half of NDP. However, anti-capitalist ideology and public sector competition peripherialized the private industrial sector, diverting its resources abroad or into tertiary or speculative activities and keeping it on a small scale: thus, 98% of the 40,000 or so private manufacturing enterprises employed less than 10

workers (World Bank, 1980, v.4:54, 166). Nevertheless, some small private factories protected from foreign competition thrived in fields such as knitwear, shoes and food processing by importing modern machines and buying supplies from the public sector (Longuenesse 1978; 1979). Despite two waves of economic liberalisation in the 1970s, this structure remained essentially unchanged through the eighties for, although liberalisation allowed handfuls of capitalists to enrich themselves as agents of foreign firms or in construction, tourism, black-marketing and importing, they invested little in industrial enterprise (SAR 1989:77, 170–171).

The public industrial sector was, however, afflicted with bureaucratisation and politicisation which deprived it of dynamism. Planning authorities could not impose a coherent plan against ministerial empire building and political patronage. Overcentralization allowed plant managers little operational authority to enhance efficiency. Low pay, political appointments and rapid turnover meant a lack of quality experienced managers. There was a scarcity of technical staff since once they acquired expertise and experience in public industry, they moved to the higher paying private sector. Workers were seen by managers as negligent, obsessed with personal benefits, and unwilling to cooperate in solving problems. They were unmotivated because low wages forced many to work second jobs and wages were tied to seniority, not skill or productivity. Because wages for skilled workers were higher in private industry, they tended to leave public industry, making it the refuge of the unskilled. Excess labour was also typical because of a state policy of maximising employment, the use of the public sector to provide political sinecures, or because of obsolete equipment (SAR 1973; Odeh 1977; Daqqaq 1977).

Similar problems existed in matching output to markets: firm managers had little freedom to adjust to changing market conditions and export agencies were habituated to a bureaucratic rather than a merchandising orientation. Low export capacity meant bottle-necks in access to foreign exchange, spare parts and raw materials, and many plants operated at low capacity as obsolete, under-maintained equipment broke down.

The financial performance of public industry was weak. Firms' plans concentrated on the volume of production, not profitability. There was little control of costs, "big gaps" in accounting, and hardly any cost-benefit analysis which could measure the efficiency of different operations or investments. Factories tried to simply mark up prices sufficiently over costs to give a 10% return on investment. But social policy often dictated otherwise: some industries such as fertiliser, textiles, and sugar often had to sell their product at prices

near or below cost, resulting in low profits or losses. Apparent profitability in public manufacturing (whether as a percentage of sales or assets), hovered around the 4–7% range in the 1968–1975 period (World Bank v 4: 1980:180–181).

The result was that industries were, at best, able to self-finance machinery replacement and some modest modernisation. But the surpluses of the public industrial sector were insufficient to finance major upgrading or building of new plants. Major investment had to be financed by external loans and aid or internal deficit financing. In short, the public sector failed to become an engine of capital extraction and accumulation which could drive industrialisation and substitute for private entrepreneurship.

B.
The limits of public resource mobilisation

The central vulnerability of the Ba'thist political economy was that neither public sector accumulation or taxation produced sufficient resources to finance the state's many commitments. Taxation only accounted for about 25% of state revenues. Domestic resource mobilisation only covered about 2/3 of total public expenditures on government, defence and development into the eighties (World Bank 1980, v. 4:48; Clawson, appendixes 4 & 5). Indeed, development plans always expected to substantially rely on external financing, especially as Arab oil money became available; thus, during the expansionary seventies, Syria's ambitious 4th Five Year Development Plan (1976–1980) actually only expected public sector surpluses to finance 54% of investment and of this much was to be provided by Syria's oil revenue rather than the profits of its industry (World Bank 1980, v.4:101).

Underlying this vulnerability was Ba'thist Syria's inability to mobilize sufficient savings to support high rates of investment. In the sixties (1963–67) savings (11.4% of GNP) covered a larger proportion of investment (13.6% of GNP) than later but the regime could only mount relatively modest investment efforts. In the seventies and eighties when a big investment drive got underway, the gap between it and savings widened precipitously: between 1973 and 1986 savings covered barely one-half of investment (Hinnebusch 1995b: 310; World Bank 1980, v. 2:18; SAR 1989:480–81; SAR 1984:564).

The consequent deficits in government operating and investment budgets were filled by a combination of aid or credit. Arab transfers made up a large proportion of total financing, growing from about 13% in the early Ba'th years to nearly a quarter of the total in the eighties. The remaining gap was filled by deficit financing or foreign borrowing. Deficit financing varied from an average 6.6% of the total

government budget in 1966–1976 to a high of 22.5% in 1976 when Arab aid temporarily dipped (Hinnebusch 1995:309–10). External borrowing (e.g. from suppliers) also helped fill the gap. Overall, Clawson estimates that although Syria earned $25 billion in exports from 1977–88, (1989: 14–17) balancing its trade deficit depended on receipt of some $20 billion in civilian aid ($14 billion of it grants) and $10 billion in worker's remittances.

C.
Economic growth and decline

For a substantial period, notably in the seventies, the Ba'th state enjoyed economic expansion. Overall economic growth rates were a respectable 3.7% per capita per year from 1965–1986, better than the 2.6% average for middle income LDCs. Indeed, until the eighties the growth rate was better than the pre-Ba'th era average of 4.6% (1953–63). Though the sixties were a period of structural instability, growth was nevertheless a respectable 5.5% of GDP yearly. In the seventies, oil money backing dual public and private engines of the economy drove an impressive economic expansion: real GNP grew 8.2% in 1970–1975 and 6.8% in 1977–1980. A wave of public sector import-substitute industrialisation was combined with a boom in private light industry and construction fuelled by state expenditures (World Bank 1980, v. 1: ix; Clawson 1989: Table 1; SAR 1989:491; SAR 1991: 485).

However, this expansion had several flaws which sharply limited its sustainability and impact. First, a great deal of the massive public investment did not produce a sufficient corresponding expansion in production. Thus, in 1971–76, the Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) in public industry was 5.14 ($5.14 of investment capital for every $1 of new output) compared to 2.28 in the private sector. Overall investment efficiency in the economy steadily worsened in the eighties, slipping from an ICOR of 3 in 1971–1976 to 10 in the 1980s. This was due to poor management, to the long gestation of many large projects, notably big irrigation schemes, and to the numerous bottle-necks, power breakdowns, and foreign exchange scarcities which reduced the capacity of new plant (World Bank v 1:63; Clawson 1989: 36).

Second, although several five year plans (1971–80) gave priority to investment in crash industrialisation or to consolidating earlier industrial investments (1981–85), statist development failed to create a self-sustaining industrial base. Industry was diversified, but the import of capital intensive turn-key plants and the failure to build a machinery industry meant intensified, not reduced dependence on and

vulnerability to external market forces (Perthes 1995:25–44). The industrialisation drive failed to structurally transform the economy (whether measured by the proportion of GNP contributed by industry or the labour force employed in it) which continued to be dominated by agriculture and trade in the nineties.

Third, Syria's over-dependence on external resources and credit or domestic deficit financing had costs and vulnerabilities. It fuelled inflation which damaged the purchasing power of the large segment of the population on fixed incomes—the regime's own constituents—while the chief beneficiaries were speculators and traders. Then, when oil prices—hence export revenues and aid received by Syria—dropped, especially dramatically in 1986, the vulnerability of this strategy was exposed. Various economic imbalances greatly worsened in the second half of the eighties. Balance of payments deficits reached around a billion dollars in 1987 and half that in 1988. A $4 billion civil debt and a $15 billion military debt to the USSR was accumulated. Repayment became a burden and Syria fell into arrears on interest payments. A foreign exchange crisis became chronic—e.g. at the end of 1986 there was only $144 million in the treasury or two weeks worth of imports (Perthes 1992b; Hinnebusch 1995b: 312).

The regime responded with austerity measures which initially deepened the crisis in the late eighties. The engines of growth shut down: the state budget, the major source of productive investment in the economy, was flat for years, but defence took up to 50% of it. State factories closed for lack of parts and materials and from power shortages, resulting in an industrial depression. In agriculture, a growing scarcity and cost of inputs squeezed peasant incomes. The plummeting value of the Syrian pound, commodity scarcities, and government spending resulted in inflation running from 50–100% at the end of the eighties.

All this resulted in the stagnation of GDP after two decades of significant growth; growth rates fell from 4.7% in 1980–83 to a negative 2.9% in 1983–87 (Hinnebusch 1995b: 311–312). Given rapid population growth of over 3% per year, this translated into a painful decline of 15% in per capita income. This, coming after a period of continual expansion, amounted to a crisis worse than that which contributed to the fall of the *ancien regime* (SAR 1989:490–91; Perthes 1992b).

D.
The exhaustion of the Ba'thist statism

The exhaustion of growth, far from being merely conjunctural, was built into the regime's state building and development strategy. Its

economic policy was less a "state capitalist" effort to maximise accumulation, than one which put economic development in the service of state building. Import substitute industrialisation, viewed as essential to national power had, in itself, built-in limits and in Syria it increased dependency on imported machinery, parts, and financing without developing a strong export sector, making trade deficits chronic. This was aggravated by the inefficiencies of the public sector, which, in turn, were a symptom of a more general sacrifice of economic rationality to the political logic of state building. Thus, the regime's initial redistributive "inclusionary" strategy fostered consumption at the expense of accumulation. Asad's drive to build a maximum sized coalition required patronage rewards for a wide range of actors which dissipated resources. The state bureaucracy was used to create employment and the Ba'thist "democratisation" of patronage widened the net of corruption from a few families to a larger portion of the population. On top of this, the Arab-Israeli conflict added another layer of "overcommitment" by the state. It dictated the diversion of public resources which might otherwise have gone to economic development into a massive military machine. The creation of the instruments of power—party, army, bureaucracy, resulted in bureaucratic over development straining the state's economic base.

At the same time, the Ba'thist model discouraged alternative sources of development. Protection of the regime's populist constituency—cooperatized peasants, public sector workers—constrained private sector capital accumulation. Partly owing to the lack of business confidence, much private enterprise took the form of real estate speculation and import-export operations which widened consumption rather than commodity production. The on-going struggle with Israel, in depressing investor confidence, channelled private investment into short-term speculative ventures, and made Syria ineligible for foreign private investment on an serious scale. Syria's front-line status in the Arab-Israeli conflict did make it eligible for massive Arab aid but this, in relieving the regime of the urgency of choice between development and defence and easing pressures for economic reform, merely postponed a serious attack on the root of the problem.

The economic troubles of the late eighties did, however, put growing pressure on the state to alter its strategy. The fiscal crisis forced the regime into austerity measures which, in cutting populist welfare and investment expenditures, amounted to a certain withdrawal of the state from its core economic responsibilities; as the state withdrew, it encouraged a revival of the private sector to fill the gap. Moreover, as the state economy stagnated, a semi-illicit economy developed, based on the smuggling of commodities and foreign exchange and often financed by remittances of Syrians abroad. Austerity also generated a

greater receptivity toward free enterprise among the Ba'th's constituents who, previously dependent on state patronage, now had to diversify their resources by setting up petty businesses. It was in these conditions that the regime began to move away from statism and toward economic liberalisation (Perthes 1991, 1992a).

III.
THE POLITICS OF SELECTIVE ECONOMIC LIBERALISATION

Economic pressures did not mechanically dictate liberalisation but were mediated through a policy process in which contending interests sought to shape the outcome while the top elite sought to contain the crisis and calibrate the extent of economic liberalisation according to the changing balance of costs, benefits, pressures and opportunities.

On the one hand, the extent, depth and rapidity of economic liberalisation were constrained by the interest of the regime and its core constituencies in maintaining a major role for the state in the economy. First, the power elite, recruited through a socialist party and a sect which used the state as a ladder of advancement, had a powerful stake in statism. This was reinforced by the corruption of elites who were enriched on smuggling or payoffs to evade bureaucratic regulations. Those who normally would bear the costs of liberalisation —public employees, workers—were part of the regime coalition while the beneficiaries—the bourgeoisie—was a historic rival on which the state could not afford to become excessively dependent. The regime's precarious legitimacy rested, in part, on providing welfare and economic opportunity for the popular strata in its original constituency and political logic required it protect its worker and peasant base from the encroachment of a revived bourgeoisie. In addition, the potentially dangerous urban mass, susceptible to bourgeois-backed Islamicism, had to be placated with cheap food and jobs. Moreover, the public sector had to be protected as the state's main revenue base; public sector surpluses, amounting to around 10% of total GDP, financed more than a third of all state expenditures and this could not readily be replaced by easily evaded taxes on the private sector (Hinnebusch 1995b: 309). Finally, the army's priority claims on economic resources as long as the conflict with Israel persisted, dictated continued state control over the economy.

On the other hand, variations in economic pressures and opportunities periodically altered the cost-benefit calculus of policy makers. After 1986, mounting resource scarcities seemed to give the regime no alternative to liberalisation; but the beginning of production in new high quality oil fields combined with a break in the bad

weather for agriculture which plagued the country in the eighties, provided some relief from the tightening economic noose on the regime at the end of the decade. Syria's 1990 stand against Iraq in the Gulf war was rewarded with large payments from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states which gave the regime further breathing room (Hinnebusch 1995b: 313). But shortly thereafter the collapse of Soviet and Eastern bloc markets removed any alternative to fuller integration into the world capitalist market. With the seemingly permanent stagnation of oil prices, further influxes of Arab Gulf money into Syria looked likely to take the form of private investments rather than state aid. At the same time, the state began to perceive opportunities from economic liberalisation: there was considerable hidden local capital as well as private capital accumulation held abroad by Syrians or by Syrian expatriates which, under more liberalised conditions, might be invested in productive enterprise in Syria.

However, economic liberalisation, to be economically effective and politically unthreatening, required the emergence of a reconstructed bourgeoisie on good terms with the regime and prepared to invest and to push for liberalisation. In the late eighties, the state-connected wings of the Syrian bourgeoisie saw opportunities to profit from selective liberalisation but wanted continued protection and a role for the state as a source of contracts and monopolies. Moreover, the bourgeoisie as a whole remained largely commercial and rent-seeking, its industrial wing weak and unable to substitute for the public sector (Bahout 1994; Perthes 1991, 1992a; Hinnebusch 1995b: 313–15; Hinnebusch 1997:251–2).

The rough balance at the start of the nineties between rising forces for economic liberalisation and weakened but entrenched interests opposed to it, allowed the top elite some autonomy to shape economic policy according to its own changing ideologies and interests. Under Asad, the parameters of economic policy were always framed by raison d'etat: just as statism was partly a function of bipolarity and Soviet aid, and his early liberalisation measures, of the need to repair national unity in preparation for war, so the disappearance of Soviet power and the contraction of Soviet aid, technology and markets meant an international political economy hostile to etatism. Although Asad was unwilling to promote the complete unravelling of the statist system he had helped construct, selected economic liberalisation, in further coopting the bourgeoisie, could enhance his autonomy of the party, army, and Alawi jama'a and hence his ability to accommodate Syria to post-Cold War globalization.

By 1990 an elite consensus had consolidated around the desirability of controlled economic liberalisation (Heydemann 1992). Once

powerful socialist ideological resistance to liberalisation was dissipated by the embourgeoisment of the elite. Crucially, the climate shifted in favour of liberalisation as business partnerships developed between the private sector and the children of the political elite, who increasingly felt themselves, as their fathers never had, to be part of the bourgeoisie and who were confident that economic liberalisation would work for them. The exhaustion of the public sector and the collapse of communism put remaining party ideologues on the defensive. The ideological insistence on the public sector as the "leading sector" increasingly gave way to acceptance of private investors as full permanent partners in development.

Nevertheless, there was also a pragmatic consensus that liberalisation had to be selective and carefully controlled. A Soviet-like collapse of the statist system before a market was in place had to be avoided. Because the private sector was believed to be mostly interested in short term, low risk, high profit enterprise, the public sector had to continue to invest in strategic industries. While the private sector would be encouraged to specialise in production for export, the public sector would continue to meet basic popular consumption needs. The public sector would not be privatised but it had to be reformed and made more profit driven (Sukkar 1994). This strategy, it was thought, would diversify the country's economic base, minimise risk and enable the top elite to continue balancing between the bourgeoisie and the regime's bureaucratic and plebeian constituencies.

Within these parameters, the extent and pace of liberalisation was determined in good part by bureaucratic politics: an intra-regime competition between liberalising "technos" and statist "politicos." (Hinnebusch 1997; Perthes 1995:203–271). The technos were relatively strengthened by the declining credibility of statism; moreover, Asad, in pushing the party from its monopoly of policy making while giving business semi-institutionalised access to policy makers, reshuffled the deck in their favour. The liberal wing of the elite was led by technocrat-ministers such as Muhammed al-Imadi, the Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade, the most consistent and effective advocate of greater liberalisation. Party apparatchiki and trade unionists defended state regulation of business and the public sector as essential to the "social contract" in which mass political loyalty was contingent on a state guarantee of a minimum level of welfare. This was, however, no sharp cleavage: Imadi was no free market ideologue and, having been educated in 1960s development theory, affirmed the need for a state role in the economy. The party was not uniformly hostile to liberalisation and welcomed private sector investment as a source of jobs and foreign exchange.

Liberalisation came in two waves. In the late eighties, state constraints on the private sector were significantly reduced; notably, as public sector import monopolies were dismantled, the private sector share of foreign trade widened rapidly. Joint public-private companies, most developed in tourism and agriculture, generated common interests between state and private elites; while the state retained a share of assets and some control in these companies, management was in private hands and the companies were exempt from state planning and regulation (Hopfinger 1990). According to a leading private businessman, this approach, avoiding the opposition of the trade-unions, was Syria's special road to privatisation.

The centrepiece of the second wave of liberalisation was the major new investment law, No. 10 of 1991, which welcomed foreign and private investment in industry, permitted repatriation of profits, waived import duties and taxes and allowed investors to import hard currency outside state channels. Highly progressive income tax rates were slashed (Poelling 1994; Hinnebusch 1995b, 1997).

These initiatives stimulated private sector expansion. In the early nineties—for the first time since the Ba'th took power—private investment significantly exceeded the state investment budget. By 1994, $1.78 billion had been invested in about 474 new firms under Law No. 10 and, by the end of the nineties, investment had reached $9.5 billion. A mini-boom pushed up real growth/year from 4.9% in 1987–89 to 8% over the 1990–94 period (Hinnebusch 1995b: 311, 317). The new private investment was probably not enough, however, to substitute for declining public industrial investment as it was largely confined to the tertiary sector; where private business did invest in industry, it was to set up consumer industries under European license, which could quickly recoup their investments (Perthes 1992a).

The investment climate was arguably not liberalised enough to attract sustained productive investment. Significant constraints remained built into the political system, including continued bureaucratic obstruction, corruption, and punitive currency laws which prevented many businesses from freely acquiring foreign currency needed for the imports on which their businesses depended. The relation of less favoured and smaller businesses to the Alawi barons still resembled the payment of mafia protection money. Private sector industrial growth took the form of a further proliferation of small enterprises owing to fear of government regulation, populist labour law and the absence of financial markets to finance expansion. Long awaited further reforms, notably a private banking sector and a stock market, were not forthcoming. Business confidence remained tempered by fear of post-Asad instability, lack of peace with Israel, and the weakness of rule of law.

By the late nineties, the Syrian economy was again stagnating, as trade deficits turned negative, drought devastated crops, and several international oil companies, unable to reach agreements with the government, departed. Significantly, Egypt, long far behind Syria in living standards, was riding a boom of investment which allowed it to nudge ahead of a still investor-unfriendly Syria in GNP/capita. Syrian negotiations to join the Euro-Mediterranean partnership suggested an awareness that sustained investment flows required further reforms. However, the increasing frailty of the president and the stalling of the peace process paralysed further innovations in economic policy, leaving the bourgeoisie increasingly frustrated as the new century was ushered in.

IV.
THE VULNERABILITIES OF POPULIST-AUTHORITARIANISM: PA AS A TRANSITIONAL NEO-MERCANTILIST FORMULA

Late developers like Syria may need a strong state to initiate national development and the pervasiveness of PA in the Middle East in the post-independence period suggests this was a dominant belief among state builders (Waldner 1999). But when state expansion exceeds certain limits, it becomes counter-productive. The use of populism, militarism, and patrimonialism to foster regime autonomy and capabilities over-developed the state relative to its economic base. The neo-mercantilist subordination of economic to political logic meant a crisis of public capital accumulation while the simultaneous diversion of public revenues into private hands fostered a new bourgeoisie in the shadow of the state. As such, authoritarian-populist regimes appear to foster the very conditions and forces which, over the longer term, undermine them and Ba'thi Syria was no exception.

PA regimes cannot wholly ignore the demands of economic rationality, and must, as statism reaches its limits, partly liberalise their economies and stimulate private sector revival. But political rationality deters the radical liberalisation which would jeopardise their statist/populist power base. The regime institutionalises power in social forces which, having established their dominance at the expense of the bourgeoisie, cannot look with equanimity on processes which would most empower this historic rival. Since populist authoritarianism, far from disciplining the masses, taught them they had social rights, full capitalist revival would arguably require a repressive exclusionary strategy which would alienate them and make the regime yet more dependent on the bourgeoisie. Ba'thist Syria exemplified this dilemma.

In the nineties, however, Syrian policy makers still retained enough autonomy to balance social forces and shape a selective liberalisation compatible with the regime's social base and stability. Indeed, Syria seemed to be relatively immune to global pressures for liberalisation. The relative diversification of its economic bases—public and private investment, domestic petroleum and externally donated rent—meant that, while it had to seek a modus vivendi with the bourgeoisie, it retained substantial autonomy of it. It was also able to evade liberalising demands from international economic institutions (Perthes 1995:6–7). And as long as Syria's regional arena remained one of conflict and insecurity, Syrian elites inevitably put undiminished state power ahead of economic development.

However, if, as seems likely, the state cannot continue to extract sufficient economic resources, it will have little choice but to tolerate further economic liberalisation and as the state comes to depend more on private and foreign capitalist investment, it will have to be more responsive to bourgeois demands. This is bound to have political consequences. It could generate a more overt alliance between the state and the bourgeoisie behind capitalist development, that is, a move toward the conservative bureaucratic authoritarianism (BA) arguably needed to begin rolling back the populist social contract which deters private investment. This is the route Egypt after Nasser has taken, but the likely consequent loss of the Ba'th regime's plebeian social base would make this more risky for it than for Egyptian elites who can depend on a cohesive deferent society. It is also hard to see what ideological project could unite the Syrian elite and the bourgeoisie against the masses. Even the most liberalised version of Ba'thism rejects the inequalities accompanying capitalist development and there is no obvious substitute for Ba'thism which could legitimate continuing authoritarian rule in the service of capitalist development.

On the other hand, as indicated previously, a succession struggle could lead to enhanced political liberalisation in which all social forces, including plebeian elements, acquire greater freedom to defend their interests in the design of the post PA-order. Over the long run, deepened economic liberalisation will generate pressures for rule of law and advance the gradual dispersion of economic power from the state to autonomous groups and classes with the potential to check state power and eventually force greater democratisation.

In either case populist authoritarianism will be superseded. As such, the function of PA regimes may be thought of as mediating, for better or worse, the transition of Middle East states from their fragile under-developed starting points at independence to their reincorporation

into the world system—perhaps now better equipped to hold their own —in the age of globalization.

Chapter 7
SYRIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The Syrian state began as a fragile artificial entity at odds with itself and enjoying few power resources. It was also both profoundly irredentist and a recurrent victim of stronger neighbours. Within twenty years it had been transformed into a regional middle power. Since then, no other Arab state has proved so adept at exercising power out of proportion to its natural endowments or so resolute in ensuring that its interests could not be ignored (Drysdale and Hinnebusch 1991:1–9). This outcome was a function of state formation within; yet that formation was itself dependent on the state's ability to extract resources—arms and oil money—from the international system.

I.
THE DURABLE DETERMINANTS OF SYRIAN FOREIGN POLICY

A.
Identity

Syria's foreign policy was rooted in both its Arab national identity and the frustration of the ambitions inherent in that identity. The lack of a prior history of Syrian statehood comparable to states such as Egypt and the relative success of Arabism as the dominant common identity, ensured that the foreign policy of independent Syria would be shaped by the ambitions of Arabism. Added to this was an enduring and profound irredentism issuing from the frustrations of Syria's national aspirations by the Western imposition of the Middle East state system. A truncated Syrian state was separated from its Arab environment, subjected to French rule and detached from the rest of *bilad ash-sham* by the creation of separate "mandates" in Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan (Tibawi 1969: Zeine 1960). Thereafter, national identity, rather than attaching to the truncated Syrian entity, regarded as the

artificial creation of imperialism, tended to focus on trans-state "imagined communities"—Greater Syria, Islam, above all, the "Arab nation." No Syrian political leader could gain credibility for a foreign policy which did not affirm Syria's membership in this wider community and its pivotal role in defence of all-Arab causes. Imperialism also sponsored the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine. No Arab people, bar the Palestinians themselves, have found it more difficult to accept the legitimacy of Israel's creation at the expense of Arab Palestine. Israel became a formidable enemy on Syria's doorstep and a permanent obstacle to its nationalist aspirations

Syria's Arab identity and its frustrations issued in a foreign policy role which, though altering over time, survived countless changes of leadership essentially intact. Syria saw itself as the "beating heart of Arabism." It was Syria that gave birth to Ba'thism, the movement which saw its mission as unifying the Arab states, and which is still the official ideology today. Syria has been the most consistent centre of Arabist sentiment and actually surrendered its sovereignty—in the 1958 union with Egypt—in the name of Pan-Arabism. Since then, however, the gap between the Pan Arab ideal and actual foreign policy behaviour has steadily widened. Ruling elites have tenaciously defended state sovereignty and, since the 1970s, public opinion, after forty years of statehood and repeated disappointments with unity experiments, came to view Pan-Arab unification projects as unrealistic.

By the late sixties, Syrian irredentism was re-focused on the struggle for Palestine which reached a climax in the effort of the radical wing of the Ba'th Party (1966–1970) to make Damascus the bastion of a war of liberation in Palestine and a Pan-Arab revolution that would sweep away pro-Western states. This, however, only brought on the 1967 defeat and the Israeli occupation of new Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan Heights. The struggle with Israel now had a specifically Syrian territorial dimension which intensified and deepened it, yet, in also focusing it on the recovery of the Golan, gradually transformed it from a battle of irreconcilable national aspirations to a resolvable contest over limited territory; that this territory was explicitly Syrian, started to alter the meaning of Arabism from a cause for which Syria would sacrifice to a means to reach Syrian ends.

In spite of these alterations in identity, Syrians still perceived the Arab states to make up a nation with an overriding national interest that ought, at least, to govern their foreign policies. Within this less ambitious view of Arabism, Syrian leaders' interpretation of Syria's role gave a distinctly Syro-centric twist to its Arabism: Syria claims,

as the most steadfast of the front line states in the battle with Israel, to be defending Arab, not purely Syrian state interests; particularly after Egypt relinquished its Pan-Arab role, Syrian leaders began to claim that the Arab national interest coincided with Syria's particular military-security needs. From the viewpoint that what's good for Syria is good for the Arab nation, they felt entitled to draw on the oil wealth of other Arab states and to discipline what they considered Palestinian particularism (Hinnebusch 1991:378).

This view took on its sharpest thrust in Syria's relations with the former "fallen away" components of *bilad al-sham*—Jordan, the Palestinians, above all, Lebanon—over which Syria, as the "parent state," came to presume special rights and responsibilities. As Seale (1992:788–89) points out, Syria perceived itself in a struggle with Israel over the Levant, in what amounted to a contest between Greater Syria and Greater Israel; it must be noted, however, that for most Syrians and their leaders there was no incompatibility between Pan-Arabism and "Greater Syria" since the latter was an integral part of the wider Arab nation and was not perceived as making up a distinct Syrian nation (Seale 1988:349–40).

Syria's insistence on the priority of its own needs was bound to end in conflict with other Arab powers at the expense of Arab solidarity. This was especially so when the regime violated conventional Pan-Arab norms in allying with Iran against Arab Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88) and in its conflicts with the PLO in Lebanon. Yet, the identification of Syrian interests with the Arab cause was no mere fiction and a purely Syria-centred policy never took form: had it done so, Syria could long ago have reached a Sadat-like settlement with Israel over the Golan instead of mortgaging its welfare and future to a struggle rooted chiefly in Arabism, not narrowly defined Syrian *raison d'etat.* Syria's goals coincided more than those of other Arab states with wider Pan-Arab norms and without pan-Arab solidarity those goals could not be achieved. Syria's definition of its "national interest" and role conception could best be characterised as Syro-centric Arabism.

By the nineties, there was evidence that the national identity of Syrians was in transition toward a more distinctly Syrian identity. Long experience with truncated Syria as the habitual framework of normal politics and accumulated consciousness of the costs of bearing Syria's Pan-Arab mission had enervated Pan-Arab commitments. However, a major watershed in legitimating a further narrowing of identity was the series of separate deals struck by Egypt, Jordan and the PLO with Israel at Syria's expense. These generated a growing readiness to accept that Syria also had to put its own interests first. The persisting dilemma for Syria, however, was that the idea of an

exclusively Syrian "nation," not essentially Arab, still held little credibility: whatever Syrian identity was, its content was Arab.

B.
Geopolitics and the balance of power

A foreign policy is shaped not just by aspirations and frustrations, but equally by material realities. Syria's geo-political location dictated an exceptional vulnerability and it normally faced an unfavourable regional power balance that necessarily tempered the wish to act on irredentist grievances. Syria's relatively small size and population provided a limited manpower base and little strategic depth or deterrence to invasion. Syria was unprotected by natural boundaries and exposed on all sides to countries, which, at one time or another, constituted threats: Iraq, whether under Hashemite or Ba'thist leadership had irredentist designs on Syria. Syria is one of only two Arab states which confronts two non-Arab neighbours. More powerful Turkey threatened intervention against Syrian radicalism in the fifties, has held hostage Euphrates waters on which Syria depends and has recently entered an alignment with Israel which encircles Syria. Above all, Israel, Syria's main enemy, has enjoyed permanent military superiority. Syria's loss of the Golan Heights, its one natural defence against Israel, generated intense new security fears. Syria is also vulnerable to Israeli outflanking movements through Jordan and Lebanon. The disadvantageous regional balance of power has pushed Syria both to accept the reality of Israel and to seek the power to contain the Israeli threat.

If Syria is not to be a victim of neighbouring powers, it must "power balance" against them through some combination of internal power mobilisation and alliance formation. The drive to right the military imbalance with Israel has been the dominant theme of Hafiz al-Asad's leadership. In this regard, Syria's location was also an asset for, at the very heart of the Middle East, it enjoyed exceptional strategic importance. Few countries had so many doors that opened on so many distinct but interacting geopolitical realms. Its front-line position adjoining Israel gave it exceptional stature in the Arab world and made it pivotal to international efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria has also historically been a natural partner repeatedly sought by states such as Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia to balance rival power constellations. This geo-political centrality gave Syria an importance which could be parlayed into resources and diplomatic support beyond its own borders (Drysdale and Hinnebusch 1991:1–3).

II.
STATE FORMATION

Syria's ability to conduct its foreign policy varied widely according to its changing level of state formation. Prior to Asad, Syrian regimes, unstable and unconsolidated at home, could not prevent Syria from becoming the prize over which stronger states fought. The consolidation of the Syrian political structure under the Ba'th was in many ways a reaction to this weakness, aimed at enabling Syria to cope with its external environment. The Ba'th state, the product of a nationalist party and an army radicalised by the conflict with Israel, developed under Hafiz al-Asad into a huge national security apparatus designed to confront Israel. It was only as Syria attained relative internal cohesion under Asad, that foreign policy makers achieved sufficient domestic autonomy and built up enough capabilities to make Syria a player rather than a victim in the regional environment (Seale 1988:492; Ma'oz 1975, 1978).

A.
Syria as victim: instability at home, vulnerability abroad

1. Post-independence Syria: a Penetrated State (1946–63): From the time of independence, the Syrian state, narrow based at home, was rapidly destabilized by the interlocking of domestic opposition with external threats. Most of the main opposition parties—the Ba'thists, the Syrian nationalists, even the traditional People's Party—rejected the truncated Syrian state in the name of a Pan-Arabism readily exploited by stronger Arab powers. At the same time, tribal leaders, notably those of the Druze and Alawi minorities, used sub-state identities to resist central rule over the periphery, sometimes with external support.

Syria's permeable artificial borders and Pan-Arab sentiment meant external penetration of Syrian politics in which rival Arab powers financed, even armed, clients and backed military coups in Syria while contending Syrian elites looked for external patrons and protection. Syrian governments were both periodically threatened by projects for union with other Arab states and enticed by the protection limited union might afford against stronger states or domestic opponents. Hashemite ambitions to absorb Syria included King Abdullah's Greater Syria plan and Iraq's Fertile Crescent scheme. Abdullah saw the Hashemite led Arab revolt against the Ottomans as conferring legitimacy on his leadership over all Syria while Syria's first President, Shukri al-Quwatli, insisted his leadership was based

in the popular sovereignty of elections and sought protection through alignment with anti-Hashemite Egypt and Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah had partisans inside Syria, notably the Druze Atrash family, which blocked government control over the Jabal Druze, but his British and Zionist connections de-legitimised his leadership pretensions in the eyes of most Syrian nationalists and Britain discouraged Jordanian military intervention in Syria (Seale 1965:5–15; Mufti 1995:43–59; Maddy-Weitzman 1993:15, 41–43).

The new Syrian state's effort to consolidate public loyalties was fatally compromised when the precarious legitimacy won in the independence struggle was shattered by the loss of Palestine. The Quwatli regime, buffeted by an aroused populace which raised volunteer forces to fight in Palestine, eventually committed its small regular army; but although it was able to seize and hold a few border slivers of Palestine, war profiteering and incompetence undermined its effort. So did the rivalries which obstructed co-operation among the Arab armies; for example, Abdullah's collaboration with the Zionists to divide up Palestine and Quwatli's fear that this was a first step in a bid to create a Greater Syrian empire, deterred Syrian-Jordanian coordination. After the Zionist victory, only army intervention prevented a breakdown of public order amidst popular revulsion against a now discredited establishment. The refusal of the beleaguered government, constrained by a nationally aroused public, to either sign a peace treaty with Israel or agree to the construction of an American sponsored oil pipeline from Saudi Arabia, inspired CIA intrigue in the army, only the first episode of destabilizing Western meddling in Syrian politics. This, and the politicians' attempt to put the blame for the Palestine failure on the army, led to Col. Husni al-Za'im's 1949 coup d'etat. After he moved to meet American demands, began peace negotiations with Israel and otherwise generally alienated all political forces, Za'im was himself overthrown (Seale 1965:37–63; Rathmell 1995:22–61).

After Za'im, Iraq seemed best positioned to pick up the pieces in Syria. The opposition People's Party *(hizb al-shab)* came to power championing union with Iraq as a way of gaining protection against Israel. The People's Party was dominated by the rising Aleppo bourgeoisie which felt marginalized by Damascene control of government and had been cut off from its historic markets in northern Iraq. Its call for union with Iraq aimed to win over Pan-Arab opinion in Syria and to enlist Iraqi help against rivals such as Quwatli's National *(watani)* party and later against the middle class army officers under Adib al-Shishakli that challenged its leadership of government in the early fifties. In the union negotiations, Baghdad ostensibly wanted a strong union with merged armies and diplomatic

corps while the *shab* prime minister, Nazim al-Qudsi, wanted a decentralised arrangement preserving Syria's republican system and exempting it from the provisions of Iraq's treaty with Britain, anathema to Arab nationalist opinion in Syria. It was believed that US and UK acceptance were needed to realise the union but they were not encouraging and Israel made its opposition known. Egypt proposed an Arab collective security pact under the Arab League as an alternative solution to Syrian vulnerability, Saudi money was used to buy politicians, and nationalist parties—even the unionist Ba'th—rejected subordination to the proBritish Iraqi monarchy. It was, however, the Syrian military under Col. Shishakli which, fearful of its subordination to Iraqi command, vetoed the union proposals and eventually overthrew the *hizbal-shab* government. Iraq considered intervention but, discouraged by Britain and France, contented itself by trying to subvert the Syrian army. Thus, Syrian sovereignty was preserved, not by popular attachment to the state, but by a combination of domestic division, the army's stake in statehood, international support for the status quo, and the regional power balance. Throughout the region such forces operated to preserve the regional states system in spite of its lack of popular legitimacy (Maddy-Weitzman 1993:105–114; Seale 1965).

By the mid-fifties, it was the threat from Israel which was the most keenly felt as Syrian-Israeli animosity escalated, feeding on border skirmishes over the de-militarised zones left over from the 1948 war. Syria could not do without protective regional or international alignments, but Syrians were deeply divided over the proper alliance. Syria's security needs and domestic divisions interlocked with the inter-Arab struggle between pro-Western Iraq which advocated joining the Western-sponsored Baghdad Pact and Nasser's Egypt which opposed it in the name of non-alignment and Arab collective security. Since the outcome was believed to turn on winning over Syria, a regional and international "struggle for Syria" took place (1954–58). The mobilisation of Syria's nationalist middle class swung the balance in favour of Egypt while Nasser's rising stature as a Pan-Arab hero, especially after Suez, weakened conservative pro-Western and pro-Iraqi politicians and strengthened those—above all the Ba'th—aligned with Cairo. The result was the formation of Syria's 1956 pro-Egyptian, anti-imperialist National Front government. The West's sponsorship of several abortive conservative coups against it and a 1957 attempt to quarantine Syrian radicalism under the Eisenhower Doctrine, backed by Iraqi sponsored subversion and Turkish threats, precipitated Soviet counter threats against Turkey and a backlash of pro-communist feeling inside Syria. It was this polarisation of the country between rival global and regional forces, each with their

domestic backers, which led the Ba'th leaders to seek salvation in a confederation with Egypt, thereby forcing their rivals to out bid them and unleashing an uncontrollable public demand for full union. Syrian elites were swept into surrendering Syrian sovereignty to Nasser—the epitome, in the realist world view, of state weakness and foreign policy failure (Seale 1965; Mufti 1996:49–54; Maddy-Weitz-man 1993: 114–127; Rathmell 1995; as-Sayyid 1999).

2. The Ba'th Party In Power: The Primacy Of Ideology (1963–70): The coup that brought the Ba'th party to power in 1963 ushered in a new era of instability. The Ba'th regime had a narrow support base, owing to conflict with mass Nasserism (over failure of a new 1963 unity project) and the opposition of the old oligarchs and Islamic rivals. On top of this, the regime was split between younger leftist leaders more interested in a social "revolution in one country" than in sacrificing their power on the altar of Pan Arabism and party patriarch Michel Aflaq who still viewed Pan-Arab union as central to the party's national mission. Foreign policy became a tool in their struggle, with each side forced to defend itself against the other by advocating greater militancy against Israel. The radical faction seized precarious power in a 1966 coup and, driven by ideological militancy and a search for legitimation through a revolutionary foreign policy, literally risked the Syrian state once again. In trying to incite a war of Palestine liberation, it ignored the unfavourable balance of power with Israel and thereby brought on the 1967 defeat and the Israeli occupation of new Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan Heights (Ben Tzur 1968; Yaniv 1986; Rouleau 1967).

Meanwhile, the split of the Syrian Ba'th party with the founding leadership, the loss of the 1967 war, and the dominance of the new Syrian leadership by the Alawi minority, alienated many Syrian Ba'thists who remained loyal to or switched their allegiance to Aflaq's now exiled Pan-Arab leadership. In 1968, the Iraqi branch of the Ba'th seized power in Baghdad, recognised Aflaq's legitimacy as nominal Pan-Arab leader and began trying to subvert the Syrian government, resulting in several failed coups by Aflaq partisans. In the accompanying ideological war between Damascus and Baghdad, each regime, having passed up the opportunity to achieve Ba'thist ideological legitimacy through the unification of their two states, had to "outbid" the other in militancy toward Israel and Western imperialism, the other two touchstones of Ba'thist nationalism. Syria was usually on the defensive although when it, but not Iraq, came to the aid of Palestinians under attack by Jordan in "Black September" of 1970, the Syrians acquired an ideological stick with which to beat Iraq (Kienle 1990).

The 1967 defeat again split the Syrian Ba'th regime over foreign policy, with the insistence of the radical leadership on a continuing high risk challenge to Israel countered by the new realists clustered around Defence Minister Hafiz al-Asad. Among other tactics, Asad used proposals to establish Syrian-Iraqi unity against Israel to try to win over the party and army against his left-wing opponents. In 1970, Asad ousted the ideological radicals and set Syria on a new more "realist" foreign policy course which took account of Israel's military superiority. Syrian elites had learned the "realist" rules of the state system the hard way (Kerr 1975; Petran 1972:194–257).

Significantly, once Asad consolidated his regime, he abandoned the flirtation with Iraq which could have risked his regime and Syrian autonomy. As he began relying less on Ba'thist ideology than on sectarian and personal loyalties, patronage, appeasement of the Syrian merchant class, and the legitimacy won in the 1973 war to stabilise his regime, Syria became less vulnerable to Iraq's manipulation of transstate ideological loyalties.

B.
Syria as actor: state consolidation under Asad

Asad's consolidation of the Ba'th regime and of a powerful presidency as its command post established, for the first time, the relative autonomy of the state elite to conduct foreign policy. Asad's power concentration was driven by foreign policy and shaped by international forces. It was accepted within the political elite as necessary to confront the gravest threat the country and regime had ever faced, a defeat and occupation brought on by the weakness and recklessness of a factionalized regime. With power concentrated in his hands, Asad's priority, to mobilise the power resources for the struggle with Israel, shaped the whole regime and all its policies. Asad's state building strategies were facilitated by external resources: the arms from the USSR which allowed a massive expansion in the numbers and firepower of the army and security forces and the oil money, available in significant quantities from the Gulf states, that enabled the regime to expand the bureaucracy and co-opt the bourgeoisie. Asad's national security state was legitimated by the relative success in the 1973 war and his subsequent deft foreign policy performance (Mufti 1996:231–252).

In the Presidential monarchy he created, Asad enjoyed the widest latitude in foreign policy-making. At least initially, he tried to make policy by intra-elite consensus, rather than imposing a personal view. He seemed to take account of the ideological militancy of the Ba'th party as well as more pragmatic calculations of external threat and

opportunity in his decision-making. Nevertheless, Asad was prepared to be out in front of elite and party opinion and both tendencies were apparent in key decisions during the seventies. Thus, Kissinger noted in the disengagement negotiations after the 1973 war that in Syria, by contrast to Egypt where Sadat governed alone, the whole top political elite had to be present and convinced; but in the end it was Asad who accepted Kissinger's final proposal and dragged his reluctant lieutenants along with him. According to Dawisha, the 1976 intervention in Lebanon against the PLO was also taken by a collective leadership but it is also clear that Asad overruled widespread dissent in the party and army (Dawisha 1978b, 1980; Sheehan 1976a, 1976b). As Asad's pre-eminence was fully consolidated in the 1980s, foreign policy-making became ever more his reserved sphere, subject to no bureaucratic politics in which hawkish or dovish factions could veto his initiatives (Seale 1988:340–44).

Similarly, as the Ba'th regime was consolidated under Asad, public opinion ceased to be the direct constraint it had once been on foreign policy making. Asad took several unpopular foreign policy decisions, notably the 1976 intervention against the PLO in Lebanon, the alignment with Iran in the Iran-Iraq war and the stand with the Western coalition against Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait. This is not to say that public opinion had no effect. The regime had to take care not to irreparably damage its legitimacy which rested, ultimately, on its claim to defend the Arab cause against Israel. As long as Asad could justify unpopular decisions as necessary to the long term struggle with Israel, he evidently calculated that opposition could be contained. Such decisions nevertheless, had domestic costs; arguably, the 1976 intervention against the Palestinians so damaged the regime's legitimacy that it was much more vulnerable to the Islamic rebellions of 1977–1982.

The link between foreign policy and domestic politics was not that the former was designed to deal with the latter, but that decision-makers could never safely ignore the impact of policies designed to cope with external threats on their very precarious domestic legitimacy. The bottom line was that no nationalist regime—especially an Alawi-dominated one—d could, without grave risk, deviate from mainstream opinion in dealing with Israel. If Syria's government and public opinion can be said to approach a consensus on any issue it is over Israel: Syrians rejected its legitimacy but nevertheless wanted a political settlement provided it was an honourable one entailing a comprehensive Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. This was the government position for decades.

Asad's state building resulted in an approximation of realism's ideal model of policy making, namely a unified leadership with

sufficient autonomy of domestic constraints to freely adapt foreign policy strategies to the changing geopolitical power balance. At the same time, Asad was enabled to mobilize the resources giving Syria the military capabilities needed for the regional power struggle.

III.
GUNS OVER BUTTER: CAPABILITIES, MILITARY BURDENS AND THE DIVERSIFICATION OF DEPENDENCY

A.
Military capability

Under Asad, Syrian military power steadily expanded. The 1967 defeat stimulated a massive rebuilding and professionalization of the armed forces which paid off in improved performance during the 1973 war. Thereafter, Egypt's separate peace, leaving Syria facing Israel alone, and Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon set off further rounds of military build-up aimed at enough parity with Israel to constitute a deterrent and give backing to Syrian diplomacy.

By 1986, Syria had an enormous armed forces for a state of its size: 5,000 tanks, 650 combat planes, including 200 high performance aircraft, 102 missile batteries and over 500,000 men under arms. A Soviet-supplied long range air umbrella and around 400 ballistic missiles, some chemically armed, gave Syria a new deterrent capability. An Israeli attack on Syria was likely, given this balance of forces, to be very costly, with no guarantee that Syria could be defeated. On the other hand, Syria lacked a credible offensive capability against Israel; although a surprise attack might have seized the Golan, it was unlikely that Syria could hold it against an Israeli counterattack (Z. Maoz 1986; Levron 1987).

According to Evron (1987), the Syrian build-up produced mutual deterrence which relatively stabilised the Syrian-Israeli military confrontation. Syro-Israeli rivalry was thereby diverted into a struggle for influence in the Levant—over the PLO, Jordan, and above all, into a low intensity proxy war in Lebanon; this was paralleled in the nineties by a diplomatic struggle over the conditions of a peace settlement. In these struggles, Syria's military deterrent was vital to its political leverage. It meant Asad need not bargain from weakness and it even allowed him to apply military pressure on Israel in southern Lebanon at reasonable risk. Syria had to scramble, after the collapse of its Soviet arms supplier, to prevent the degradation of this deterrent.

B.
Economic capabilities

Syria's turn to statist "socialism" from the late fifties was, in good part, driven by the belief that a nationalist foreign policy could only be pursued by diluting economic dependency on the West. The political destruction of the landed and capitalist class snapped clientele links between Syria and the West. They were replaced by growing economic links to the Soviet block explicitly motivated by the desire to break free of Western constraints and acquire Soviet protection.

Under the Ba'th, a high degree of state control over the economy allowed Asad to harness it to his foreign policy after 1970. In Syria's search for parity with Israel, 15–17% of GNP and from a third to a half of public expenditures were devoted to defence. Twenty percent of manpower served in the armed forces at its height in the eighties. Military spending increased from $1.8 billion in 1977 to $5.4 billion in 1984. If one includes the value of arms imported on credit, Syria's military spending climbed to 30% of GDP (Clawson 1988).

But military build-up came at economic cost and increased dependency since Syria's slim economic base could not, alone, sustain its enormous defence establishment. Development and consumption also made claims on limited resources, especially given Syria's rapidly growing population, creating a permanent resource gap and forcing Syrian dependence on external aid and loans. According to Clawson (1989), from 1977–88, Syria self-financed only 45% of imports, the remaining $42 billion being covered by grants and loans from the USSR ($23 billion), the GCC states ($12 billion), Iran ($3 billion) and the West ($4 billion). In the late eighties, however, external aid sharply declined: Arab aid may have fallen by one to two-thirds of the $1.8 billion received in 1978. Meanwhile, the Soviet military debt burgeoned and the heavy burden of military spending helped bring economic growth to a halt.

The immediate result of economic constraints was a levelling off of Syria's military build-up in the late eighties. Economic constraints did not, however, force a major change in foreign policy. Though the economy was under maximum pressure in the eighties, Asad refused to change his policies in Lebanon and his alliance with Iran to please his GCC donors. The potential constraints on foreign policy from the regime's economic dependency were eased by the diversification of Syria's donors and its ability to balance between rival Soviet/East European, West European, Arab Gulf and Libyan or Iranian sources of aid; foreign policies that alienated one donor might win rewards from the other. Although Asad exploited foreign policy to win economic relief—this was a factor in joining the anti-Iraq coalition—

he had no record of taking decisions for economic reasons which would not otherwise have been taken on strategic grounds (Waldner 1995; Diab 1994:87).

It might be argued that foreign policy-making so seemingly detached from economic constraints was an abnormality which could not be indefinitely sustained and depended on certain temporary conditions such as high oil prices and inexpensive Soviet arms on credit. But, even when conditions became less favourable, the regime found various safety valves which allowed it to maintain a huge army and resist pressures to change its foreign policy.

IV. FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY: THE RATIONAL ACTOR?

Asad's enhanced autonomy and capabilities permitted him to pursue policies approximating those which realists might expect of a rational actor. Rationality was manifest in Asad's realist scaling down of the highly revisionist goals deriving from Syria's identity to fit the constraints of geopolitics; by his consistency and his acquisition of the required means in pursuing these more realistic goals; and by his deft adaptation of his strategies to the external power balance.

1. Limited goals: Asad's assumption of power marked a major break in Syrian foreign policy. Pre-Ba'th governments were too weak to contemplate either war or peace with Israel while the Ba'th radicals were driven by unrealistic and dangerous ideology to the neglect of the calculus of power. Asad replaced this policy with the still ambitious but more realistic goals of recovering the occupied lands, above all the Golan and achieving Palestinian rights, notably in the West Bank and Gaza, as part of a comprehensive peace under UN Resolution 242. At the same time, he positioned Syria to more effectively attempt the containment of Israeli power through military deterrence and alliances.

The triumph of realism was evident in Asad's initial pivotal decisions: his opposition to the radical's 1970 intervention against King Hussein and his détente with the traditional pro-Western Arab states marked the end of revolutionary revisionism. Decisive evidence of the limited nature of Syria's aims in the struggle with Israel was its conduct of the 1973 war: Syrian forces attacking into the Golan made no attempt, where they had the opportunity, of advancing into Israel itself, evidently not even having planned for such an eventuality (Wakebridge 1976:27; Maoz 1988:90). Asad's unconcern to annex Lebanon, even after Syria established hegemony there, and his stand in the 1990–91 war against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait demonstrated a

rather non-Ba'thist acceptance of the principle of state sovereignty. Far from being a Pan-Arab revolutionary, Asad pursued the limited and conventional goals prescribed by realism, namely, recovery of territorial losses and maintenance of a balance of power against threats.

2. Consistency: Asad demonstrated great tenacity in pursuit of his scaled down strategic goals by refusing to settle for less than full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines. For a quarter century, he eschewed a separate settlement with Israel at the expense of the Palestinians. When the balance of forces did not permit achievement of a comprehensive peace, rather than concede principle, Asad preferred to work for a change in that balance, while actively obstructing schemes to draw other Arab parties into partial, separate settlements. When such vital interests were at stake, he was prepared to stand up to superior external power and proved to have a cool nerve not easily panicked; this was best illustrated by his risky obstruction of the 1983 Lebanese-Israeli accord at a time when Israeli and American power was projected right on his "Lebanese doorstep" (Seale 1988:494).

3. Strategic Adaptability: matching means and ends: Asad proved himself a master at mixing a variety of foreign policy instruments—limited war, alliance formation, negotiations, obstruction—as conditions dictated. A realist who believed that military power was decisive in international politics, he matched his pragmatic scaling down of Syria's objectives with a significant upgrading in its military capability, not only as a deterrent against Israel, but also to give his diplomacy credibility. Yet, ever cautious and preferring to husband his limited resources, he deployed the most economic and least risky means possible to attain his goals; this characteristic was most evident in his measured use of proxies in Lebanon (Maoz 1978; Seale 1988:366–420).

Because Syria alone lacked the resources to sustain its policy, Asad put a high priority on manipulating alliances, regardless of ideology, which would allow him to mobilise the resources of other states behind his goals: thus, he simultaneously sustained alliances with the conservative Arab oil states, the Soviet Union and Islamic Iran.

Nor did Asad eschew diplomacy. Although extremely wary of the pitfalls of negotiating with Israel, he was ready to bargain when it could be done from a position of enough strength to win some advantage; otherwise, a man of great patience, he preferred to wait until the balance of forces improved (Sheehan 1976b).

In short, Asad effectively adapted to the changing and usually unfavourable balance of power. He parleyed limited resources into

greater influence over outcomes than would be expected from Syria's base of national power.

4. Manipulating Bi-polarity: Asad also used Syria's geo-political centrality to mimic Nasser's balancing between the superpowers. The resources and protection needed to confront Israel made a superpower patron indispensable and Asad proved extremely adept in exploiting superpower rivalry to get the wherewithal for a foreign policy which could not otherwise have been sustained.

Given American backing of Israel, a close Soviet alignment was natural in a bipolar world. Soviet arms deliveries were key to Syria's relative success in the 1973 war and thereafter in the drive for parity. The Soviet Union's role as patron-protector had a crucial deterrent effect on Israel's freedom of action against Syria. In particular, Soviet support was pivotal in giving Asad the confidence to challenge Israeli and American power in Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion (Cobban 1991:112–138; Drysdale & Hinnebusch 1991:149–174; Ramet 1990).

At least from Damascus's point of view, the US consistently biased the regional power balance in Israel's favour, not only by ensuring its military superiority but by dividing the Arabs, notably in detaching Egypt from the anti-Israeli coalition. While relations with the US were, thus, naturally and permanently uneasy, Asad nevertheless sought to exploit US fears of Middle East instability to get American pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. Also, US mediation more than once proved its value in keeping Syro-Israeli rivalry in Lebanon from escalating out of control. While for a period under Reagan, the US treated Syria as a Soviet surrogate to be punished, Asad exploited Bush's need for Syria in his anti-Saddam Gulf War coalition to appease the Americans at a time when Soviet power was declining (Drysdale & Hinnebusch 1991:174–199; Maoz 1988:135–148; Seeyle 1985).

V.
ASAD'S FOREIGN POLICY IN ACTION: KEY WATERSHEDS IN THE STRUGGLE WITH ISRAEL

A.
Toward limited war in 1973: building a war alliance

A realist, Asad was convinced Israel would never withdraw from the occupied territories unless military action upset the post-1967 status quo. The main thrust of his policy after coming to power was preparation for a conventional war to retake the Golan. Toward this

end, the rebuilding of the shattered Syrian army had to be the first priority. He maintained Syria's close alliance with the USSR to secure arms. He put aside the radicals' ideological cold war and forged new alliances with the Arab oil states that secured the financing needed for a military build-up. And, he struck a strategic alliance with Sadat's Egypt, the most militarily powerful of the Arab states which shared Syria's interest in recovery of the occupied territories (Seale 1988:185–225; Kerr 1975).

B.
The resort to diplomacy (mid-1970s)

Egypt and Syria went to war in 1973 to break the stalemate over the occupied territories. Although Syria failed to recover the Golan militarily, Syria and Egypt acquired enhanced political leverage from their credible challenge to the pro-Israeli status quo and from the Arab oil embargo. Asad sought to exploit this new leverage to get international pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.

The first episode in this new strategy was Asad's acceptance of Kissinger's mediation of the Golan Heights disengagement negotiations. Weakened by Sadat's prior and unilateral first disengagement and the pre-mature lifting of the oil embargo, Asad conducted a war of attrition on the front with Israel as part of a "fighting while talking" bargaining strategy. The resulting 1974 Golan disengagement agreement with Israel was seen as a first step in total Israeli withdrawal (Sheehan 1976a, 1976b). However, Sadat's subsequent separate deals with Israel further undermined Syrian diplomatic leverage and shattered the Syro-Egyptian alliance needed to pressure Israel into a comprehensive settlement. In its place, Asad tried to build up a Levant block which would bring Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians into Damascus's orbit, prevent separate dealing with Israel by them and give Syria extra cards in the diplomatic manoeuvring of the late 1970s. From this base, Asad made a bid for Arab leadership as Syria's main rivals were marginalized—Egypt by its separate peace with Israel and Iraq by its war with Iran. It would be as a Pan-Arab leader that Asad believed he could recover leverage over the superpowers on behalf of a comprehensive settlement (Seale 1988:226–266; Maoz 1988:113–134).

C.
Tactical rejectionism (1980s)

Once Sadat's separate peace with Israel exhausted the 1970s peace process, Asad's aimed at preventing the legitimation of the "Camp David process" in the Arab world and at claiming the Arab aid and support to which Syria was entitled as the main remaining front-line Arab state. This aid financed a military build-up aiming at parity with Israel: the threat of an Israel emboldened by the neutralisation of its southern front had to be contained, while Asad believed that the resumption of peace negotiations depended on restoration of a more favourable Arab-Israeli power balance. In the meantime, Damascus would obstruct all attempts at partial or separate Israeli agreements with other states that tried to circumvent Syria. This "tactical rejectionism" aimed to demonstrate that if Syria could not achieve an Arab-Israeli peace to its liking, it could at least prevent one which damaged its interests or Arab rights: that seemed to be the lesson of Syria's role in the collapse of both the 1983 Lebanese-Israeli accord and of the 1985 Hussein-Arafat bid for negotiations with Israel under the Reagan Plan. But this rejectionism, combined with Syria's stand with Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, antagonised a multitude of Arab and Western powers and isolated Syria. Throughout much of the eighties, therefore, Syria was largely lacking in the diplomatic leverage to advance its goals in the struggle with Israel (Seale 1988:267–315, 344–49).

VI.
ASAD'S REGIONAL POLICY: ARABISM OR SYRIAN REASON OF STATE?

Despite Asad's insistence that his decisions were shaped by Pan-Arab interests, he was accused of pursuing a Syria-first policy not really very different from that of Egypt. Three decisions, in particular, could be held to demonstrate his readiness to violate Pan-Arab norms for Syrian state interests. But each of them can be seen, from his point of view, to serve his wider nationalist strategy against Israel.

A.
The intervention in Lebanon

Syria's 1976 intervention in Lebanon against the PLO was widely interpreted as serving Syrian reason of state, even a "Greater Syria" project. Certainly, this assault on the acknowledged representative of the Palestinian cause, the touchstone of Arabism, cost the regime

considerable Arab nationalist legitimacy. Asad's strategy in Lebanon nevertheless served a plausible view of the Arab national interest in the conflict with Israel. He aimed to restore some of the leverage over Israel Syria was losing as Egypt moved toward a separate peace, by assembling an alternative Levant bloc. The civil war presented an opportunity for Syria to insert itself as arbiter and thereby draw Lebanon and the PLO into this sphere of influence. But Lebanon was also a special danger spot, vulnerable because of its civil war and the Palestinian presence, to penetration by Israel: Asad was aware of efforts by some Maronites to draw Israel into the fighting on their behalf and feared the conflict would throw the Christians into the hands of Israel and balkanise Lebanon.

Prior to its intervention, Syria had backed the Palestinians against a Maronite war of ethnic cleansing and then tried to broker an end to the civil war through reforms meant to appease each side: a mild redistribution of power in the Muslims' favour, Palestinian respect for Lebanese sovereignty. But when the Lebanese Muslims and the PLO rejected these reforms in the name of a secular radical state and appeared intent on a military defeat of the Maronites—inspired, Asad charged, by sectarian revenge—Syria forcefully intervened against them in mid-1976. Asad hoped to deter a Maronite alignment with Israel by demonstrating Syria's unwillingness to countenance a sectarian triumph over them. As the Palestinians defied him, he also sought to deprive the PLO of the autonomous Lebanese stronghold from which it could evade Syria's pressures for strategic "co-ordination." He was determined to prevent the emergence of a "rejectionist" Palestinian-dominated Lebanon, sponsoring guerrilla war against Israel, giving the latter an excuse to evade peace pressures, and, in alignment with rejectionist Iraq, constraining Syria's peace diplomacy. This scenario would give Israel an excuse to intervene militarily in Lebanon; not only might it realise its supposed historic ambition to seize southern Lebanon, but an Israeli drive through the Bekaa Valley to split Syria and encircle Damascus was by no means implausible. Asad's intervention allowed him to position his army in the Bekaa Valley to guard Syria's soft Western flank (Hinnebusch 1986; Chalala 1985; Dawisha 1978b, 1978–79, 1980, 1984)

Furthermore, Lebanon was, given the PLO presence there, key to Asad's drive to control the "Palestinian card:" Syria's bargaining leverage in the Arab-Israeli conflict would be greatly enhanced if it enjoyed the capacity to veto any settlement of the Palestinian problem which left Syria out or to overcome rejectionist Palestinian resistance to an acceptable settlement; who controlled Lebanon was in a strong position to control the PLO. Interpreting Asad's intervention, as

critics did, as a bid to break resistance to a separate Syrian peace with Israel at the expense of the Palestinians goes too far, however; although the intervention, in diminishing Palestinian power and demonstrating Syrian moderation to the US and Israel, better positioned Asad for such a settlement, he continued to insist on Palestinian rights and a comprehensive settlement, arguably passing up a chance to follow Sadat down the road of separate peace (Hinnebusch 1986; Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997:71–76; 116–156).

B.
The Iranian alliance

The second decision Asad took which could be interpreted as a violation of Arab norms was his siding with Iran against Arab Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war. This decision arguably served regime and Syrian state interests by weakening and diverting the threat from a powerful neighbour run by a rival wing of the Ba'th party. But this decision, too, can be interpreted as a part of Asad's overall strategy in the struggle with Israel.

Syria was increasingly vulnerable in the face of superior Israeli power following Egypt's defection from its Syrian alliance after Camp David and the quick collapse of Syria's anti-Camp David alliance with Iraq brought on by Saddam Hussein's seizure of sole power in Baghdad. At the same time, the Islamic revolution had transformed Iran from an ally of Israel and a US surrogate into a leading opponent of both. Although no substitute for Egypt's active presence on Israel's southern front, Islamic Iran, with its fierce anti-Zionism and its strategic weight, was a valuable asset in the Arab-Israeli power balance and a counter to Syria's relative isolation.

Asad condemned Iraq's invasion of Iran as the wrong war at the wrong time against the wrong enemy, predicting, rightly, that it would exhaust the Arabs, divide them, and divert them from the Israeli menace (Seale 1988:351–65). Asad's alignment with Iran was cemented during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon when the dramatic effectiveness of the Iranian-sponsored Islamic resistance to Israel in helping to foil a mortal threat to Syria, proved the strategic value of the Iranian alliance (Seale 1988:366–420, 396–97). Iran was the sole state besides the Soviet Union to stand with Syria in its hour of critical need. Sensitive to Arab opinion, however, Asad actively discouraged Iranian threats to Iraqi territory (Hirshfield 1986; Chalala 1988; Marschall 1992; Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997:87–115).

C.
Joining the Gulf War coalition

The third and most difficult case to reconcile with Arabism was Syria's adhesion to the Western-led anti-Iraq coalition. Some pundits attributed Asad's decision to economic need and rivalry with Iraq, but while these played some role they were, by themselves, totally inadequate to explain Syrian policy. Rather, strategy in the struggle with Israel permeated each of the many ostensibly separate considerations which went into Syrian decision-making.

It is true that Syria had long depended on Saudi economic support which, Asad must have realised, would become all the more important as ties with the East bloc slackened. He undoubtedly came under some pressure to reciprocate the Saudis' support for Syria against Israel by standing with them in their hour of need; otherwise Syria risked future loss of Saudi aid whether Riyadh was alienated or brought under Iraqi influence. The crisis was a perfect opportunity to revitalise the GCC subsidy channel. Asad had never before allowed economic factors to dictate strategic decisions: in this case, however, Saudi support was so indispensable to the maintenance of Syria's strategic position in the battle with Israel that economic and strategic factors became indistinguishable.

Likewise Syrian-Iraqi rivalry, while ostensibly important to Asad's decision, is, in itself, an insufficient explanation. To be sure, Saddam Hussein was hostile and had an enormous army; but there was no history of military confrontation between the two states, and, after the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam was preoccupied with his southern front and less a threat to Syria than heretofore. The threat from Iraq was that if Saddam succeeded in annexing Kuwait (and, by intimidating Saudi Arabia, in potentially wielding the oil weapon), he would be in a stronger position to claim Arab leadership in the conflict with Israel at Syria's expense. Syria could not permit any other state to dictate decisions which could lead it into a war with Israel or entrap it in a peace settlement it found unacceptable.

Nevertheless, the political risk in joining the Western-led war coalition was high. Standing with the West against a fellow Arab nationalist state did serious damage to Syria's Pan-Arab legitimacy, an intangible but crucial asset from which Syria traditionally made its claim on the Arab support needed to sustain its policy toward Israel. The actions of the coalition also damaged Arab assets Asad needed in the struggle with Israel; they brought Arab oil resources—potential leverage in any peace process—more closely under Western control and destroyed Iraq, a major Arab power in the balance with Israel. But this might have happened regardless of what Syria did.

Adherence to the coalition was, in part, a culmination of Syria's drive to get out of the Arab isolation which the Iranian alliance and tactical rejectionism had brought on and to situate itself for a new round in a largely diplomatic contest with Israel. In the late eighties, Syria had been estranged from Egypt, which progressively inched out of its isolation while Iraq, Syria's main Arab rival, emerging unexpectedly strengthened from its war with Iran, began to support Maronite defiance of Syria in Lebanon, and to assert leadership, at Syria's expense, in the Arab-Israeli conflict. By 1989, Asad was being forced to make the tactical retreats necessary to make Syria a part of rather than a victim of the emerging Arab consensus. Reconciliation with Egypt on Cairo's terms—i.e. acceptance of its separate peace—was meant both to balance the Iraqi threat and possibly to use Cairo's good offices with the US to soften American efforts at isolating Syria (Diab 1994:82–83). Joining the Gulf war coalition put Syria back at the heart of a renewed Cairo-Damascus-Riyadh axis from which it could hope to orchestrate an all-Arab front on behalf of its struggle with Israel.

Ultimately, however, Syria's policy was more decisively and strategically shaped by the emerging breakdown of the bipolar world. By the 1990s, the withdrawal of the USSR as a reliable patron-protector and arms supplier deprived Syria of a credible threat of war against Israel in the absence of an acceptable peace; how would hundreds of tanks lost in a new war be replaced or Israeli advances stopped without Soviet intervention? Without Soviet protection, Syria was also left dangerously vulnerable to Western animosity for its obstruction of the peace process in the 1980s, and, particularly for its alleged resort to terrorism, which Israel could exploit to justify an attack on it. A more long-range consideration was the threatened disappearance of the Eastern bloc as a source of markets, aid and technology and the consequent need to repair economic links to the West frayed during the eighties over the terrorism issue.

An exposed Syria had no choice but to repair and diversify its international connections. In particular, Asad understood that he could not realise his goals in opposition to the remaining American superpower. Syria's struggle with Israel would henceforth have to take the form of diplomacy instead of military threats and that meant détente with the US which alone had leverage over Israel. Asad needed to get the U.S. to accept Syria as the key to peace and stability in the Middle East and to recognise its legitimate interests in an equitable settlement with Israel.

The Gulf war presented a golden opportunity to trade membership in the coalition—to the credibility of which Syria's nationalist credentials were arguably crucial—in return for American

acknowledgement of Syrian interests (Armanazi 1993:114). Asad's gamble was that after the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was resolved, the US would have to fulfil promises to its Arab allies and resolve the Israeli occupation of Arab lands in a comparable way—on the basis of UN resolutions. In short, Syria saw the "New World Order" shaping up and wanted to influence it rather than become its victim. The decision was in Asad's tradition of seizing opportunities to enhance Syria's power position by turning defeat (Soviet collapse) into victory (realignment toward the USA).

Adhesion to the Gulf coalition provided a valuable side benefit, namely, American and Israeli tolerance of Asad's military intervention to defeat General Aoun's Iraqi-backed challenge to Syria's role in Lebanon. The establishment of hegemony in Lebanon would thereafter allow Asad to "play the Lebanon card" in inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Being on the right side of the "New World Order" reaped immediate strategic rewards.

In summary, the primary explanation of Syria's decision to join the Gulf war coalition was *external threats and opportunities.* The threat was only secondarily from Iraq and primarily from the potential that the post-bi-polar balance of power would leave Syria helpless against Israel. Joining the coalition offered the opportunity to recover Syria's power position in this conflict. By contrast, Asad's realpolitik was remarkably little constrained by *domestic politics.* Indeed, Syria's participation in the coalition seems to validate, as no decision before, the regime's relative autonomy from domestic opinion which was broadly pro-Iraq. In the end, however, regime legitimacy suffered remarkably little. Saddam's defeat and the destruction of Iraq showed what Asad had spared Syria (Diab 1994:82–83; Keinle 1994b: 384–85, 392–93; Hinnebusch 1997b; Quilliam 1999:155–74; Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997:78–83).

In all these cases, the apparent contradiction between Pan-Arab norms and Syrian behaviour is resolved to the extent that Syria's power position in the struggle with Israel coincided with the Arab national interest. It is plausible to accept that there was considerable overlap in the two at a time when Syria constituted the only Arab power still actively trying to contain Israeli power while refusing a separate peace at the expense of Palestinian rights.

VII.
SYRIA IN THE POST-BI-POLAR WORLD AND THE PEACE PROCESS

A.
The new power balance

Asad perceived the "New World Order" emerging from the end of the Cold War as profoundly biased against Arab and Syrian interests. The balance of power, he declared, had been upset [with the collapse of bipolarity] and the "main winners have been the Arabs' enemies;" while other parts of the world were forming regional blocs, the Arab world was going in the opposite direction, with individual Arab states putting their security in the hands of outside powers to the detriment of all the Arabs. Syria struggled to minimise such detrimental regional consequences of the post-Cold war global order.

While Syria's entry into the Gulf coalition and the peace process had put US-Syrian relations on a better footing, Washington's 1993 blocking of Syrian weapons acquisitions and its failure to remove Syria from its terrorism list kept relations uneasy. Syria sought to evade the effects of America hegemony in the region by maximising links to other powers. Securing access to arms after the fall of the Soviet Union was a first priority and Syria sought alternative sources in China and North Korea. Using their desire for debt repayment as leverage, Syria also had some success in re-establishing economic and arms relations with Russia and the Eastern European states and evidently acquired much high quality equipment at cut rate prices. Perhaps most important, Russia evidently forgave much of Syria's military debt and resumed some arms and spare parts shipments on a commercial basis, though reputedly deferring to Israeli demands it restrain advanced weapons deliveries. Syria also preserved its Iranian alliance as a counter to US dominance in the Gulf and as a partner in the development of an arms industry. Finally, during the Gulf war Syria re-established damaged relations with Western Europe which became Syria's main trading partner and source of economic aid in the post-bi-polar era. Nevertheless, the "New World Order" was far less favourable to Syrian interests than the bipolar world in which Asad had so deftly exploited Soviet-American rivalries.

Syria also faced an enhanced threat on its northern border with Turkey. Syrian-Turkish relations were strained over historic Syrian resentment of Turkish annexation of Iskanderun (Alexandretta) and Turkish accusations of Syrian support for "terrorism" by Kurdish PKK guerrillas against Turkey. Disputes over Syrian rights to a share of the Euphrates water, whose flow Turkey used as political leverage

over Damascus, were acrimonious. With rapid population growth, urban sprawl and continuing vulnerability to drought putting massive pressure on Syria's limited water resources, Turkey's effort to dictate the distribution of Euphrates water was a grave security threat. And, Turkey's growing military accord with Israel spelled Turkish-Israeli encirclement which Asad tried to balance by closer ties with Egypt and by reinforcing his alliance with Iran. This was the classic "checkerboard" power-balancing typical of "realist" geo-politics (Hinnebusch 1998a).

B.
Syria in the peace process

Asad's entry into the Madrid peace process marked, not an abandonment of Syria's goals, but their pursuit by other means. As Shimon Peres put it, Asad conducted the peace process "just as one conducts a military campaign—slowly, patiently, directed by strategic and tactical considerations." Asad aimed to maximise territorial recovery and minimise the "normalisation of relations" and security concessions Israel expected in return (Hinnebusch 1996b: 44).

Asad, had, however, to made key concessions in order to enter the peace negotiations, specifically, conceding separate face-to-face negotiations rather than the joint Arab negotiating team on which he had long insisted. Thereafter this made it impossible for Syria to insist on the coordination of a common bargaining position with Jordan and the PLO. When the PLO opted for Oslo, Syria forfeited any pretence of wielding the "Palestine card" in dealing with Israel; but it was also relieved of the responsibility to make its own recovery of the Golan contingent on the satisfaction of Palestinian rights. Thereafter Syria negotiated for the Golan alone.

In these negotiations Syrian diplomacy displayed a new flexibility. Israel's 1993 admission that the Golan was Syrian territory stimulated Syria to break the deadlock over whether Israeli commitment to withdrawal or Syrian acceptance of peace had to come first. Syrian negotiator Muwaffaq al-Allaf put forth a formula under which *the more land Israel conceded the more peace it could have* and Israel responded that *the depth of withdrawal would correspond to the scope of peace.* Asad agreed a settlement would result in the establishment of "normal relations" He also agreed to leapfrog a formal resolution of the core land-for-peace issue and negotiate the security arrangements on which agreement would have to be reached if Israel were to withdraw from the Golan. In these negotiations, Syria conceded asymmetrical de-militarised zones on the border with Israel. However, negotiations stalled over an Israeli demand for a

surveillance station on Mt. Hermon, an affront to Syrian sovereignty which Asad took as evidence Rabin was not yet ready to strike a deal. With the 1996 Likud election victory, the opportunity for a settlement was missed, although the 1999 election of Ehud Barak revived prospects for one which Asad welcomed (Hinnebusch 1996b; Muslih 1994; J.Moore, 1996; Seale 1996; Cobban 1999).

Contrary to the claims of some pundits (Pipes 1996), Syrian domestic politics was no major obstacle to reaching an equitable political settlement with Israel. Syria's behaviour in the negotiations was shaped by what Israel was willing to concede and what Asad believed the power balance would allow him to achieve and very little by Syrian domestic politics. The Alawi barons, confident of retaining their dominant position in the post-peace downsized army and security forces, did not overtly oppose a settlement, while Syrian business, ambivalent about the consequences of a peace for business, did not push for one. The economic consequences of peace neither attracted or repelled the regime sufficiently to be a decisive factor in its policy. Syrian public opinion defined only the broad—but by no means unchangeable—boundaries of what Syria could accept. Crucially, it did not deter pursuit of the less-than-comprehensive settlement which appeared in the cards after Oslo: the separate Palestinian and Jordanian deals with Israel at Syria's expense convinced Syrians the government had to give priority to Syria's interest in recovery of the Golan. Asad lamented: "What can we do since the others have left us and gone *forward?"* (*The Middle East,* Sept. 1995, p 8). There was intense war weariness among Syrians, a desire to divert resources from the military and, especially among the bourgeoisie, a new perception of opportunities in economic relations with the West. But the sort of settlement that seemed possible—one which returned the Golan but failed to more than very partially satisfy Palestinian rights—would be no legitimacy windfall for the regime. The failure to reach a settlement, however, seemed no better an option and Asad was keen to reach one, aware that if he died before a solution, no successor—including his son Bashar—was likely to be strong enough to deliver one (Hinnebusch 1998a; Quilliam 1999: 175–228).

Asad built his state to fight Israel and in the long run, of course, peace would both require and make possible major changes in it. The regime would have to find an ideological substitute for the Arab nationalism that for so long had endowed it with a modicum of legitimacy and greater economic and political liberalism might be the only viable solution. Peace would probably produce an influx of private, Arab and foreign investment, bolstering bourgeois civil society, tying Syria into the pro-business rules of the international

political economy, generating transnational pressures for liberalisation and creating economic interests in keeping the peace. The right combination of leadership succession, economic opening and peace in the Middle East could therefore transform the Syrian state; but until these come together major change remains in abeyance.

VIII. CONCLUSION: SYRIA IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The international system literally constituted the Syrian state and Syrian foreign policy has ever since been driven by a reaction to that experience. It is impossible to understand the durability of Syria's foreign policy goals without appreciation of how Arab identity and domestic politics kept alive deep seated irredentist protest at the mutilation of *bilad ash-sham* and the fragmentation of the Arab world under imperialism. The Ba'thist state was literally a product of the Arab nationalist reaction to this, while the centrality of Arabism to the legitimacy of the state ensured its precepts would drive and constrain policy making.

The 1967 war disaster was, however, a watershed in tempering Syria's irredentism. It was both a consequence of Syria's failure to conform to the realist survival rules of a state system and a precipitant of the major changes needed for its survival in this system. Severe threat levels and the high cost of ideological policies led to the rise of a realist leadership which defined more limited goals and pursued them within the constraints of the power balance. The new realist elites also undertook the state formation which gave them the autonomy at home to take realist decisions and the military capability to implement them. Syria was thereby socialised into the rules of the regional state system. At the same time, the international environment determined the resources and constraints shaping Syria's ability to pursue its policies: Soviet arms and oil rent on one side, American support for Israel on the other.

The end of the Cold War arguably marks another comparable watershed in Syria's foreign policy environment. Up to now, Syria has only grudgingly adapted to this new era of globalization; but in the long run it is unlikely it can escape increased conformity with whatever global order is consolidated.

AFTERWORD

"President Asad is dead; long live President Asad"
Middle East International, 16 June 2000

In the days after Hafiz al-Asad died, dynastic succession seemed, of the many possible succession scenarios, to be unfolding with remarkable smoothness. The regime's closing of ranks in support of Bashar alAsad's elevation to power seemed designed to forestall both any challenges from below and the claims of Rifat al-Asad, the main "pretender" for power. The lowering of the constitutionally required age to hold the presidency on Bashar's behalf, his appointment as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and his election as Ba'th Party General Secretary seemed, despite his lack of any credentials save apparent designation by his father, to go uncontested. Bashar's path to power had apparently be cleared by a purge or retirement of regime barons who might have challenged his right of succession, including intelligence boss Ali Duba, army chief of staff Hikmat al-Shihabi and Prime Minister Mahmoud Zubi. Although Vice-President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, the Ba'th Party regional command and the parliament each issued key decrees legitimating Bashar's appointments, this drama was seemingly being orchestrated from behind the scenes by a cabal of Alawi oligarchs who must have seen in him a way to preserve the unity of the Alawi community and the continuity of Alawi dominance. Significantly, the main victims of the purges were Sunni figures who might enjoy some credibility among the wider non-Alawi majority.

Bashar has positioned himself as a "moderniser." Educated in Britain, an advocate of information technology and economic modernisation, leader of an anti-corruption campaign under his father, and seemingly representative of the educated younger generation, he had acquired a certain legitimacy among those who longed for orderly change. But Bashar will find it difficult to live up to this promise and image. He almost certainly lacks the personal stature to govern except as a

consensual leader. He may be a front man for an Alawi oligarchy; alternatively he could build support by co-operating with the party and parliament. He could try to widen his base through economic reform and political liberalisation, but substantial reform would threaten the pillars of his own power. In foreign policy, he may be given the benefit of the doubt in the West and may be able to put aside old animosities with other Arab leaders. But he cannot afford to squander the legitimacy with which his father's insistence on an honourable peace endowed the regime by making concessions to Israel that his father refused. And it remains to be seen whether Bashar can overcome the legitimacy deficit inherent in the seeming transformation of a radical republic into a new monarchy.

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